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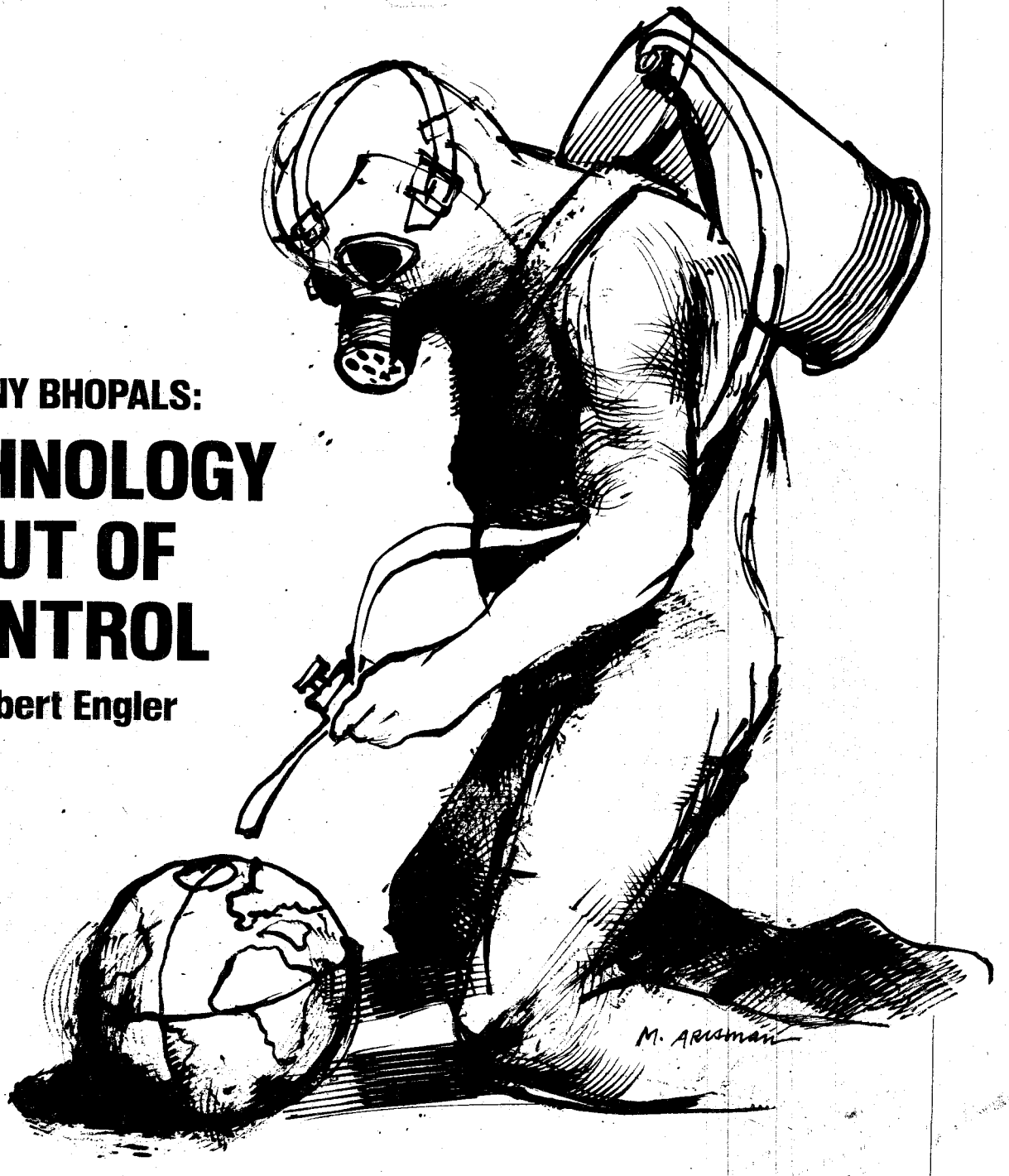

MANY BHOPALS:

TECHNOLOGY OUT OF CONTROL

Robert Engler

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LETTERS.

LET NICARAGUA BE NICARAGUA

Westfield, Mass.

Alexander Cockburn's criticisms of Nancy Nusser's article apply in spades to the arrogant nonsense written by Michael Massing ["Hard Questions on Nicaragua," April 6].

Why does *The Nation* print not one but *two* articles telling Nicaragua that it should tailor its domestic and foreign policies to liberal standards? Where does "a freelance writer who lives in New York City" get off telling Daniel Ortega to consider Finland as a role model? Who nominated him—or you—as arbiter of what constitutes a suitable "internal revolutionary process"? . . .

I do not want Nicaragua to change its policies to please Ronald Reagan or, even worse, Michael Massing (at least Reagan is consistent). Rather, I want Nicaragua to organize its own revolution, achieve its own successes and make its own mistakes, without interference. My responsibility as a socialist is to learn from that country's experiences and act accordingly.

Any more articles like this, and I will personally hand R. Emmett Tyrrell Jr. the subscription money that would normally go to Victor Navasky and Hamilton Fish. I may as well get conservative opinions from the horse's mouth. *Michael Engel*

IRRESPONSIBLE JOURNALISM

Washington

Many of us have seen the results of *contra* aggression: death and destruction directly and totally attributable to the U.S. funding of the war. It is infuriating, then, when *every* reference to the role of that war in understanding Nicaragua's plight is brushed aside with a "yes, but."

Every time Michael Massing touches on the outrageous conduct of the Reagan Administration and its mercenaries he feels compelled to balance the comment with a "nonetheless" or a "still" or a "but." He writes, "Above all, Nicaragua is a country at war, struggling against the most powerful nation on earth," but then asserts that it is wrong to see "all events inside Nicaragua through the prism of U.S. aggression." We must tell "the whole truth"; we must expose "the revolution's shortcomings."

The "warts and all" approach to history is fine in times of peace, but it can be suicidal in wartime. We have serious doubts about the validity of most of Massing's criticisms. But even if they were true, it would still be decent and intellectually defensible to insist that wartime is not the time to highlight them or to equate them with the abuses of the Administration.

Why do liberal critics like Massing and George Black have such an obsessive desire to do this? Why do they feel that it is impossible to decry the *contras*' beastliness without pointing out that there is censorship? Why do they feel it is wrong to condemn U.S. aggression without noting that the Nicaraguan government frowns on strikes in the midst of a war? If the Sandinistas were to shut down every newspaper, magazine, radio and television station *for the duration of the war*, would that make the case against U.S. aggression somehow less valid? If they outlawed strikes *until the war is over*, would that make the *contras*' atrocities less vicious?

The debate Massing wants on the role of political liberties in the revolutionary process is a legitimate one, both in the abstract and in particular cases. But it is dangerous not to recognize that being under attack puts some limits on that debate. Massing prides himself on his realistic and sophisticated appreciation of spheres of influence and the like, but he should be a little more realistic about what full-scale war involves. He thinks credibility and "intellectual vitality" require "unfettered debate" even while the war continues. But our country is responsible for the war and all its attendant horrors. Our first priority must be to stop that war; what Black and Massing are doing encourages Washington to prolong it.

Ellen Ray, William Schaap, Louis Wolf
CovertAction Information Bulletin

FUZZY 'REALPOLITIK'

Irvine, Calif.

Michael Massing laments that "the U.S. left has not led the way" in finding answers to the problems besetting Nicaragua and says we focus too much on the role of U.S. intervention, too little on the rifts inside the Sandinista leadership. Perhaps that is because the U.S. left senses that there are some debates to which the United States has not been invited, and that our national tendency to make foreign debates our debates is part of the problem, not the solution.

Still, Massing is eager to give the divided Sandinistas some guidance. . . . If the Sandinistas would recognize that, "however unjustly," the United States will destroy any revolutionary government with ties to neighboring revolutionary movements or to the Soviet Union, and if they "would renounce" such ties, then they "would receive a pledge of nonintervention from the United States."

Massing's "woulds" are a little fuzzy, but the quid pro quo they imply is utterly baffling: first, because no Central American nation can have failed to notice the U.S. propensity to intervene in the region; second, because Nicaragua has already offered precisely the sort of renunciation that Massing proposes (as he himself admits, perplexingly enough); third, because the Reagan Administration and the U.S. media have already denounced that offer as a propaganda ploy. Massing takes a rhetorical cue in this regard from the George Shultz school of damned-if-you-do-and-if-you-don't *Realpolitik*: he criticizes the Sandinistas for their censorship of *La Prensa* and explains their decision not to shut it down entirely as a politically "savvy" appeal to world opinion.

Massing concludes with a critique of "some on the left" (most of his "hard questions" are addressed to this soft-focus group) who defend Sandinista censorship by arguing that "freedom and equality don't mix." He boldly suggests that they do. The problem with this bromide is not that it isn't true but that it tends to dull us to the incompatibility of both virtues with the militarization necessary to hold off a U.S.-funded army of murderers. The political debate within the U.S. left properly focuses on strategies for opposing *contra* funding, not on mediating the ideological differences of Ortega and Borge. *James Holstun and Joanna Tinker*

MASSING REPLIES

New York City

Isn't it strange how analysis of international affairs suddenly becomes "guidance" when left-wing governments are involved? (And by a freelancer no less!) My article was not written for the Sandinistas, who clearly can take care of themselves. Nor is it addressed to a general U.S. audience; if so, I would have concentrated on the tragic consequences of Reagan's foreign policy. In writing for U.S. progressives, I did not feel it necessary to rehearse the case against U.S. militarism. I chose to write about the wide-ranging discussion I had encountered in Nicaragua and Cuba during a visit to those countries last fall. I've seen little reflection of that discussion in this country, and I thought it would be useful to write about it.

As for Alexander Cockburn ["Beat the Devil," April 13], I don't know how seriously to take someone who shrugs off censorship in Nicaragua but who screams bloody murder when—horrors!—the editor asks him to hold three paragraphs for two weeks. Never before has an article of mine been so willfully distorted. Claiming that I want the Caribbean to remain a "charnel house" is overstatement even for Cockburn. He seems to be in the dark about what is going on in Nicaragua. He seeks to prove that Daniel Ortega is no moderate (or whatever term he prefers), citing the Tercerista's support for "armed popular uprising." In fact, its great contribution to the struggle was forging ties with the middle class and other reformist elements. Ortega today continues to advocate building coalitions. For Cockburn, the very idea of differing strategies among the Sandinistas constitutes heresy. The nature of socialism is under debate from Havana to Beijing, but for Cockburn there remains only one true faith. *Michael Massing*

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EDITORIALS.

No to the *Contras*

Ronald Reagan is right that the Congressional vote on funds for his *contras* is a vote for peace. But it's the No vote that carries hope of restoring peace to the region Reagan has bloodied with war. The $14 million more the Administration is asking to aid the invading legions would only prolong the illegal, immoral and debilitating campaign against Nicaragua. It would not bring the Sandinista government into negotiations with the brutal remnants of the regime it defeated in a long and wrenching revolution. The "humanitarian aid" administered by that well-known charity the Central Intelligence Agency is good for nothing but murder, torture and economic deprivation. Reagan's war against Nicaragua, like so many others, is hell.

Contra supporters in this country have been busily looking for allies in the uncommitted center and attempting to discredit or dishearten friends of the Nicaraguan revolution. In the latter category, *The Nation* was taunted by *The Wall Street Journal* last week for "filling its pages" with a discussion of Sandinista policies and politics—a discussion the editorial writer totally garbled. It's nice to know that *The Journal* takes discourse among those on the left seriously enough to misquote it, but the voice of corporate America is dead wrong in citing our articles as indicative of a "change of heart."

To the contrary, Michael Massing and the eight others who later commented on his article, to which *The Journal* alludes, all agreed that no matter what one has to say about Managua's current affairs, there is no justification whatsoever for the U.S.-organized, -directed and -funded war against Nicaragua. Debate and discussion of particular policies is one thing, but support for subversion and invasion is utterly unacceptable, even to the Sandinistas' sternest leftwing critics. Editorialists and op-editorialists in *The Journal* have been critical of Israel; we take it they have not

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had a "change of heart" and now support the efforts of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Ditto in the case of South Africa: Does criticism of the Botha government mean that the editors now fervently desire a victory by the African National Congress? Would that it were so!

The government of Nicaragua has the right to continue its revolution, to pursue its policies and to fight its battles without intervention by the United States. Congress could impede interventionist ambitions, if not yet destroy them, and it should do that now.

Protest on Campus

On election night, hardly six months ago, rhythmic cries of "Four more years!" rose from the campus of Columbia University when Ronald Reagan's re-election was confirmed. Now that jubilant conservatism seems suddenly reversed. Hundreds of students have been picketing, fasting and blockading Hamilton Hall at the Ivy League enclave on Manhattan's Upper West Side in opposition to apartheid and to the university's investments in American companies doing business in South Africa. The chant most likely to be heard at Columbia this month is "Free Nelson Mandela!"

The university's response has been to waffle one day, stonewall the next. President Michael Sovern, who made a name for himself as a mediator in the great student strike at Columbia seventeen years ago, has warned the pickets that they face strict school discipline, and he has engaged First Amendment lawyer Floyd Abrams (who argued *The Nation*'s case on the Ford memoirs before the Supreme Court) to develop a constitutional case for protecting the rights of those who wish to cross the picket line at Hamilton Hall. But Sovern has been reluctant to call in the cops. The image of a SWAT team battling students protesting American support of South African racism is bound to be bad P.R.—even during the reign of Reagan.

Sympathy is pouring in for the students. From Johannesburg, Bishop Desmond Tutu congratulated them and, as best he could, contradicted Sovern's claim that he disapproved of the disinvestment strategy. Tutu cannot mention the proscribed word "disinvestment" for fear of imprisonment, but he alluded to it when he told a Columbia student over the telephone that "moral demands" take precedence over "financial situations." Jesse Jackson went to Hamilton Hall in the rain and told more than a thousand demonstrators that the students' "moral example" would "organize students on every campus in America."

Already there have been strikes, demonstrations and protests at Rutgers, Berkeley, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Colorado, the University of Michigan and every Ivy League university except Cornell. The anti-apartheid action represents the most significant student mobilization in a decade, and it promises to grow. Columbia's $34 million investment in the economy that runs the apartheid system is a good target, if a relatively small one. American institutions, private and public, participate in an international system of militarism, political intervention and economic exploitation that implicates us all, whether we like it or not. Columbia's students don't like it, and they are setting a stirring example for those who are similarly outraged.

Whose Technology?

The disaster at Bhopal brought to world attention immensely important issues which had been buried in academic discourse or obscure political debate. Suddenly it was urgent—even proper—to raise questions not only about technological safety and security but about the relationship between multinational corporations and Third World governments, about the long-term effect of technology on economic development, about alternatives to the concentration of industrial control in Western boardrooms and about the politics of popular participation in scientific and managerial decision-making.

In this special issue, Robert Engler analyzes the conditions at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal, the actions of people on the spot and the response of the corporation, based in Danbury, Connecticut. Beyond that, he formulates a theory about the contextual cause of the disaster, the complex interplay of corporate enterprise and government policy (in the United States and in India) that has given rise to a worldwide culture of uncontrolled technological development which brings hazards as well as benefits to economically deprived peoples.

Certainly there is no simple way to change the offending policies and recast the detrimental enterprises. An intellectual revolution of global proportions must take place before the old ideas about technology and society can be cast out. But Americans are well situated to start the process, because this country is the center of both the ideology and the practice of industrial development.

"In the United States," Engler argues, "the most valuable first step would be to reappraise the overextended and irresponsible aspects of the domestic political economy. . . . Americans must challenge the assumption that the marketplace is the sole arbiter of what technologies should be introduced at home and the assertion that their transfer abroad is a private affair. . . . Decisions on what basic technologies are needed and how and where they are to be introduced must involve people in the affected communities and workplaces."

Admittedly the political climate in the United States is not conducive to such a reappraisal. The ideology of Reaganism exalts the marketplace to mythic status and opposes any checks on entrepreneurial freedom, however destructively it is exercised. But Bhopal has stirred world consciences as it has raised political consciousness; and if it has given us one lesson, it is that there is no time to lose to set a new course for the future.

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Welcome Reversal

Last month the American Civil Liberties Union notified its affiliates that it now opposes a 1984 law tightening Central Intelligence Agency secrecy—a law it was instrumental in getting passed. The organization's board reversed its position after the release of C.I.A. letters and memorandums showing that the law could be used to cover up domestic intelligence operations and revealing details of negotiations between A.C.L.U. and C.I.A. attorneys concerning the bill as far back as 1982.

The law exempts the agency's operational files from Freedom of Information Act requests, except in a few cases. Although C.I.A. records that would reveal confidential sources, methods or national security information have always been withheld from F.O.I.A. queries, the agency was required to search and review its operational files in response to each request. According to the C.I.A., the exemption in the law would ease its administrative burden by eliminating those routine searches.

The materials that prompted the civil liberties organization's change of policy were obtained from the C.I.A.'s Legislative Liaison Office as a result of an F.O.I.A. lawsuit filed by Washington attorney James Lesar. They include a 1983 exchange of letters between the agency and the Senate Intelligence Committee. Seeking to ascertain how the law would ease the agency's workload, the committee asked, "If an FOIA request alleges that a CIA intelligence activity be unlawful . . . will all CIA files concerning that activity be subject to search and review?" On July 15, the agency replied that they would not. Under that interpretation of the law, operational files on "internal security" activities, which the 1947 National Security Act expressly forbids, would be exempt. In the same letter, the agency said that "operational activities within the U.S. are an integral part of overseas operations," and that the closing of domestic files to F.O.I.A. requests would have a "substantial impact on the agency's workload.

In supporting the bill, the A.C.L.U. essentially agreed with the C.I.A.'s contention that other F.O.I.A. requests would be sped up if the agency did not have to review operational files and that because so little information is released from those files anyway, the exemption would not appreciably reduce the flow of information to the public. According to Congressional staff members who worked on the bill, it never would have passed without the A.C.L.U.'s endorsement, so the organization's about-face is significant. The new stance is enunciated in a resolution adopted by the group's national board on January 26, after California chapters who opposed the law circulated the Legislative Affairs Office documents.

Among other things, the documents show that negotiations over the bill began in 1982, a year earlier than previously reported. One of them describes a meeting on June 28 between Mayerfeld, then the C.I.A.'s deputy general counsel, and Mark Lynch, an A.C.L.U. attorney, held in the latter's office near the Capitol. According to Mayerfeld's summary of the meeting, Lynch approved a section in the proposed legislation that would dismiss F.O.I.A. lawsuits in progress that are seeking information from operational files. Representative Romano Mazzoli, who was on the House Intelligence Committee at the time, struck that section from the bill before sending it to the floor, commenting that Congress passed only "prospective" laws, not "retrospective" ones.

After the A.C.L.U. announced its endorsement of the bill, on May 10 of last year, its California chapters rebelled. On June 6, the executives of A.C.L.U.-Southern California passed a resolution repudiating the bill and asked the national group to reconsider. The resolution adopted by the national board on January 26 puts the civil liberties group on record as opposing the most important sections of the law, including:

§ denial of access to operational files.

§ denial of discovery proceedings in F.O.I.A. lawsuits against the agency.

§ denial of access by plaintiffs to affidavits submitted by C.I.A. attorneys to the judge explaining why requests for files should be denied.

§ use of summary court proceedings instead of adversary hearings, at which both sides present evidence.

A decision by the Supreme Court last week makes the A.C.L.U.'s new stance all the more welcome. In *C.I.A. v. Sims*, the Court upheld the agency's denial of an F.O.I.A. request for the names of researchers on a behavior-control study. The decision gives the C.I.A. sweeping discretion in defining who is an intelligence source.

According to high-level C.I.A. officials, in the five months the law has been in effect it has not eased the agency's workload significantly. The skilled intelligence officers who process F.O.I.A. requests still spend half their time handling queries referred to them by government agencies that find C.I.A.-originated information in their files. Moreover, half of all requests to the C.I.A. are from individuals seeking files on themselves, which are not exempted under the new law. The agency must also deal with demands by researchers that certain documents be declassified. Finally, the law permits the Director of Central Intelligence to exempt specific operational files from search, review and release, but C.I.A. officials say they must still check the files to ascertain if the requested data has been so designated. Once the files are found to be exempt, officials need not review them, but the amount of time saved is small in relation to the agency's F.O.I.A. workload.

It remains to be seen whether the law will reduce the backlog of F.O.I.A. requests as promised. The immediate outlook is not bright. According to the C.I.A.'s information and privacy coordinator, John Wright, as of the beginning of this month the agency had a backlog of 2,600 requests.

ANGUS MACKENZIE

Angus Mackenzie directs the Center for Investigative Reporting's Freedom of Information Project. He testified against the new law, on behalf of the Newspaper Guild.

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MINORITY REPORT.

CHRISTOPHER HITCHENS

In Isabel Allende's impressive new novel, *The House of the Spirits*, which is set in a barely fictional Chile, one of the best-drawn characters is a certain Esteban Trueba. Trueba is a grandee—a brawling, egotistical landowner and an almost likable prisoner of his own appetites. He devotes prodigious energy to rallying his class against the mob and to the struggle against Marxism. He is a Senator when the workers' parties come legally to power, and he insists from the start that only violence will remove the danger to order and property. He smuggles guns into the country, solicits covert aid from the *gringos* and addresses subversive meetings of young officers. On the glorious day of the military coup, he gets into his car and drives out to congratulate the soldiery:

> The officer received me with his boots up on the desk, chewing a greasy sandwich, badly shaven, with his jacket unbuttoned. He didn't give me a chance to ask about my son Jaime or to congratulate him for the valiant actions of the soldiers who had saved the nation; instead he asked for the keys to my car, on the ground that Congress had been shut down and that all Congressional perquisites had therefore been suspended. I was amazed. It was clear then that they didn't have the slightest intention of reopening the doors of Congress, as we all expected. He asked me—no, he ordered me—to show up at the Cathedral at eleven the next morning to attend the Te Deum with which the nation would express its gratitude to God for the victory over Communism.

Trueba's veins contain real blood, not an insipid mixture of milk and holy water stiffened with liquid dollars. But as I read of his awakening to reality, I found I could clearly see the puffy, shifty, unctuous features of Arturo Cruz.

Cruz is, at one and the same time, the darling of the Reaganites and the icon of the liberals (one wishes he was the only such coincidence). It is he, and not the loutish Enrique Bermúdez or the sadistic Ricardo Lau, who is brought before the cameras like a performing seal. The face of the *contras* as seen by the villagers of Nicaragua is that of the snarling, crop-burning fascist. The same face as seen by the U.S. news media and public is that of a sheep with a secret sorrow. Here comes Arturo again, with his nagging worries about the revolution betrayed. Naturally, we are drawn to sympathize with this troubled Everyman. But why are we not introduced to Bermúdez, the man at the cutting edge of our military aid? Next question.

Cruz doesn't have the pretext of innocence. He was on hand when Edgar Chamorro, spokesman of the so-called Nicaraguan Democratic Force, gave his testimony about widespread *contra* atrocities and admitted that the aim of the mercenaries was the overthrow of the government. He knows that for speaking those unwelcome truths, Chamorro was banished from the F.D.N. ranks. Does he honestly think he would be treated differently? Does he dream of the day when "the boys" install him in the Presidency of a liberal, democratic Nicaragua? Or would just plain "President" be enough?

Not long ago I attended a breakfast meeting in Washington that featured both Cruz and Edén Pastora. Cruz was reason itself, talking of the need to separate party from state and stressing the values of pluralism. He was skeptical about the Sandinista commitment to democracy and scornful of their election. Pastora was his usual "colorful" self, still battered from the bomb that had gone off at his jungle press conference. Both men could at least claim that they had once been Sandinistas, though the returns on this claim are diminishing with time and Bermúdez.

I admit to an animus against the heroic Pastora, for when that bomb exploded, he seized the only available rapid transport and fled, leaving a woman friend of mine (who had absorbed much of the blast meant for him) horribly wounded on a river bank. Still, I listened politely while he denounced Jesse Jackson for going to Cuba, describing him as one of Lenin's "useful idiots." The next question concerned Roberto d'Aubuisson, who had just paid a visit to Washington. What did Commander Zero think of him? Pastora preferred not to give an opinion because that would be "interfering in the internal affairs of El Salvador." At that point I interjected to ask why, in that case, did he feel so free to be personal about Jesse Jackson? He asked to have the question translated, and did not reply. Unimpressive. So, when you reflect on it, is the evolution of Arturo Cruz. He would not take part in an election that he felt to be insufficiently democratic, but he will take part in a war of sabotage and attrition that has no democratic pretenses at all.

This is the old "salami tactic," operating from the right. The Christian Democrats of Chile joined gleefully and mindlessly in the destruction of Salvador Allende because they believed that they would be the beneficiaries. And certain labor types helped in the overthrow of Jacobo Arbenz in Guatemala, hoping thereby to preserve "free trade unions." The alliance with fascists, murderers and oligarchs was, of course, only temporary. Twelve years later in Chile and thirty years later in Guatemala, we can see who was using whom.

With Nicaragua, however, we don't have the excuse of hindsight. William Casey and his crew have picked Enrique Bermúdez and *his* crew, and have discarded the waverers. The installations and the infrastructure of a small underdeveloped country are being ruined and destroyed. The population is being subjected, after earthquake, war and revolution, to a calculated campaign of demoralization, a modern attempt to create a Vendée. One can feel sympathy for the youths who leave the country to avoid the draft and the rationing, but it's asking a lot to expect us to regard the mercenaries, or their two-faced spokesmen, as brave democrats. The proper historical analogy for the people is not the Founding Fathers but Benedict Arnold.

It is, finally, Cruz and Pastora who are the dupes and the "useful idiots." Their time could come only under conditions that would consign them to the well-known dustbin of history. Counterrevolutions can also be betrayed. This one will devour its parents as well as its children.

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CALVIN TRILLIN

I think it would be fair to say that I was in the Napa Valley recently as a wine consultant. Yes, I'm aware that you didn't realize I knew anything about wine. You have been under the impression that when it comes to my feeding habits I might be just a tiny bit unsophisticated. Don't be afraid to say so. I know what you're thinking: you don't understand how someone whose name has any number of times been used in the same sentence with phrases like "pigging out" could be a wine consultant in the Napa Valley. Maybe the reason you don't understand is that you don't know precisely what a wine consultant in the Napa Valley does. After all, you have never been one yourself. I thought I'd just mention that.

Yes, I did rather enjoy eating in the San Francisco Bay Area while I was out there. What was that? Too sophisticated? No, I did not find the New California Cuisine too sophisticated. Yes, I'll admit that I was relieved to find that there were still some pigeons left in the squares of San Francisco; it had occurred to me that since my previous visit, every last one of them might have been snatched up, smoked and thrown on a bed of radichio. Yes, it is true that I once expressed some concern about the amount of goat cheese being served in the Bay Area, but that was before I learned that you don't have to kill a goat to get the cheese. I like the New California Cuisine. I like California wine, too. I think it has integrity. Plenty of integrity.

No, this is not some sort of mistake. Yes, I know you had associated me more with soda pop, or maybe beer. Domestic beer. It just goes to show you. People have hidden facets. Here's one of my hidden facets: I don't know much about soda pop. It was only five or six years ago that I acquired (from a San Francisco radio talk-show host named Jim Eason) the basic drill on which soft drink goes with which sort of food. It's Coke or Royal Crown with meat, 7-Up or ginger ale with fish, and Dr. Pepper with game. But you must have known that all along. Even though I didn't, I must say I spent a lot of my childhood eating hamburgers washed down with cherry cokes—precisely the proper combination. When it comes to connoisseurship, I suppose there must be such a thing as a natural instinct.

Still, I don't make any claims about being an authority on soda pop. My daughter came home from school one day recently with the announcement that Coke and 7-Up were impossible to tell apart if you tasted them while blindfolded and holding your nose. I suppose someone who is sure of his ground on soda pop questions might have said, "Ten bucks says you're wrong, buster," or something like that. I didn't. I was willing to give it a try. What she hadn't said was that it isn't easy to drink Coke or 7-Up while holding your nose, unless you're the sort of person who approaches nose-holding from above. Being blindfolded didn't help either. But I gave it a try, and, as it happens, I was able to tell Coke from 7-Up. I don't claim to know much about soda pop, but aftertaste I know.

I don't know much about beer, either. That's another one of my hidden facets. Yes, I know I've been in any number of late-night conversations with the sort of drinkers whose pedantry about beer increases with their consumption of it. But I don't say much in those conversations. If someone asks me whether I like a particular beer, I say yes. It's true; I like them all. I feel the same way about beer that I feel about ocean views: I'm always happy to have one, but I wouldn't want to put any money on my ability to distinguish among them. Actually, I don't think many beer pedants can tell one beer from another, any more than those traveling salesmen who think they're impressing the cocktail waitress by saying "J&B on the rocks with a twist" could tell J&B from the sort of Scotch served at faculty cocktail parties. I don't think it would even be necessary to require them to hold their noses during the test, although I'll admit that a roomful of blindfolded traveling salesmen drinking J&B on the rocks while holding their noses might make a pretty sight.

I was asked to be a consultant by my friend Bruce, who makes wine in the Napa Valley. For someone who works in the wine trade, Bruce is quite open-minded. Unlike some other Napa wine people I met on a previous visit, he had not dismissed out of hand my observation, made during a discussion about similarities in certain American and French wines, that both Manischewitz Cream Pink Catawba and Château Lafite-Rothschild taste rather Jewish. Also, he has admitted to me that when blindfolded, even wine experts cannot usually tell red wine from white wine. This is astonishing but absolutely true. Check it out. Yes, I do occasionally write something that is absolutely true. It's one of my hidden facets.

During my recent trip to the Napa Valley, Bruce and I met for a drink, and he said he needed some wine advice. I figured that Bruce needed the sort of guidance that can sometimes be provided by people who have a natural instinct for connoisseurship—say, whether Pinot Noir would be appropriate with hog jowls. Yes, if you must know, I was a bit flattered.

What he needed, Bruce said, was some help figuring out how to make his wine attractive to people who know so little about wine that they choose it according to the name or the label design or the price or, in extreme cases, the shape of the bottle. I looked around the bar. We were the only ones there.

"For instance," Bruce said, "what sort of scene do you like on the label?"

I thought it over for a few moments. I finally concluded that what Bruce wanted was, in fact, simply a type of wine consultation. But you must have known that all along.

"A mountain," I said. "I like a nice mountain."

At that moment, the waitress showed up to take our order.

"I'll have a glass of red wine," Bruce said. "Unless you feel like bringing white."

"J&B on the rocks for me," I said. "With a twist."

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ARTICLES.

MANY BHOPALS:

Technology Out of Control

ROBERT ENGLER

We, civilized men and women, know everything, we have settled opinions upon everything, we take an interest in everything. We only know nothing about whence the bread comes from which we eat—even though we pretend to know something about that subject as well—we do not know how it is grown, what pains it costs to those who grow it, what is being done to reduce their pains, what sort of men those feeders of our grand selves are . . . we are more ignorant than savages in this respect.

—Pëtr Kropotkin, 1898

Last December, a toxic cloud escaping from a Union Carbide pesticide plant brought death to at least 2,500 residents of the shantytowns crowding its edges. The alchemy that overnight transformed the Indian city of Bhopal into a gas chamber injured perhaps 200,000 and brought terror and suffering to hundreds of thousands more. From a count of burial shrouds sold and other indicators, some observers estimate the total killed at between 4,000 and 10,000. Exactly how many died we may never know.

Only weeks earlier in Mexico City an explosion of liquefied-gas tanks belonging to Pemex, the government oil corporation, killed at least 450 dwellers in nearby slums. The two disasters evoked memories of Séveso, Italy, where in 1976 the dioxin from an exploding chemical reactor hospitalized hundreds and contaminated many acres. In the United States, the 1979 radiation leak from a nuclear power plant at Three Mile Island forced the evacuation of some 60,000 people in the surrounding areas. And the percolation into the soil of twenty-year-old lethal wastes stored in a corporate chemical dump site brought ailments and anxiety to 1,200 residents of Niagara Falls, New York, rendering their modest homes in the Love Canal neighborhood uninhabitable.

Each time, the headlines suggest that the calamity is isolated, unique. The search for causes begins with human error and bureaucratic ineptitude and moves on to mechanical failure and inadequate design. The limited education and rote-learned skills of the workers at Bhopal, as well as the simplicity of the surrounding populace, experts assert, hinder the developing world's introduction to better living through chemistry.

Western pundits joined in the widespread lament over the deaths in India; some offered the consolation that the disaster might have been much worse. And, as one pointed out, "Progress has always involved a certain amount of trial and error." A historian of technology calculated that half of those killed at Bhopal "would not have been alive today if it were not for that plant and the modern health standards made possible by wide use of pesticides." Thus the dead at Bhopal could be regarded as a necessary human sacrifice to the gods of modernization. *The Economist* concluded, "Thousands will not have died in vain if multinationals now build safer plants, even when local government regulations discourage them from doing so."

The question asked in the United States was, Could it happen here? Unaccustomed to the spotlight, Union Carbide took the precaution of closing a much larger plant in Institute, West Virginia, which also stockpiled the chemical that escaped at Bhopal. Named methyl isocyanate (MIC), it is used in making the pesticides Temik (banned by a number of American communities) and Sevin. A Congressional investigation of the plant, which is the only one of its kind in the country, found that twenty-eight accidental leaks (the figure was later raised to sixty-two) had occurred during the previous five years. All of them were minor, Union Carbide spokesmen assured the public, and "represented no threat to the local community." The plant was "absolutely safe." After another review of its records, the company announced that there had been 107 in-plant leaks of phosgene, which is poisonous and volatile, and twenty-two leaks of a mixture of phosgene and MIC, but not in illegal or harmful quantities. It also disclosed that only three months before the Bhopal tragedy there had been an internal safety warning about the storage of the unstable methyl isocyanate at Institute. The plant had no equipment for automatically detecting MIC leaks. Instead, its managers relied on "odor and/or eye irritation [of personnel]," although such sensitivity might not be apparent until safety levels had been exceeded. The plant was found unprepared to cope with a potential "runaway reaction" in time to prevent a major catastrophe.

The recommendations from corporate headquarters resulted in additional safety measures at Institute. But no comparable message had been sent to the Indian sister plant. Meanwhile, Du Pont, heretofore a customer for Union Carbide's MIC, announced it would produce the chemical itself in a closed loop system, that is, "whip it through a pipe" for instant use in its own pesticide product so as to minimize the transportation and storage of the lethal chemical. Its plant is located outside Houston. In mid-February Union Carbide declared it would resume production in West Virginia following some procedural changes and the installation of a computer system to trace chemical leaks.

Robert Engler is the author of The Politics of Oil *and* The Brotherhood of Oil *(both from The University of Chicago Press). A former assistant to the president of the National Farmers Union, he is a professor of political science at Brooklyn College and the Graduate School of the City University of New York.*

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Could It Happen Here?

When one studies disasters like that at Bhopal not as freak happenings against all expectations but as integral to industrial development, and when one views American occupational and environmental casualties in aggregate terms, then the answer to the question, Could it happen here? becomes clear: it already has and will continue to.

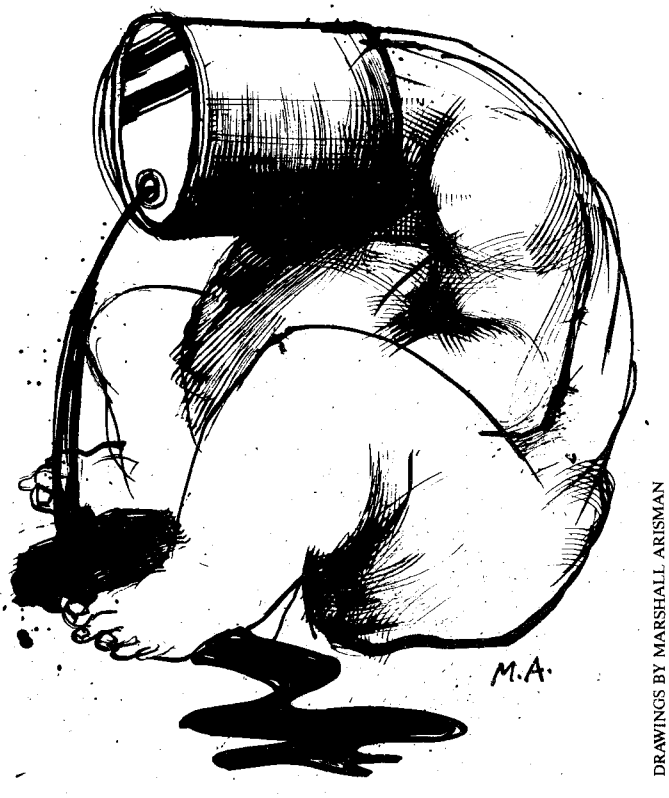
Although a precise body count is difficult to arrive at, the illnesses and deaths each year in this country caused by the production and use of arsenic, asbestos, benzene, coal and cotton dust, silica, toxic dyes, uranium, vinyl chloride and hazardous waste chemicals number in the hundreds of thousands. A complete history of American mining, foundries, mills and farming, along with a host of other industries, would yield a staggering casualty list. Yet this continuing chemical warfare against the American people has remained largely unanalyzed; it is considered an incidental cost of growth or played down as hysteria. Periodically, in the wake of a dramatic shock to the public conscience, the issue is "discovered" and a burst of reform fervor triggers demands for greater corporate responsibility and more stringent public regulation.

Despite the repeated wonder at these recent occurrences, they are nothing new. In 1908 Dr. Alice Hamilton began investigating lead and other industrial poisons and fighting against them. In 1924, oil refinery workers went into convulsions and died from "loony gas," tetraethyl lead. The dust raised by the blasting of a West Virginia water tunnel by a Union Carbide subsidiary in the early 1930s killed almost 500 workers and disabled another 1,500, most of them unskilled and black. Sixty years ago asbestos companies were refused insurance, yet only recently has asbestos received public recognition as a major cause of cancer—a costly consequence of making employee health information a privilege of private ownership.

The cumulative record for the developing world is even more shocking, though figures are imprecise. In India, where the permissible limits on workplace exposure to lead are much higher than in the United States, one-fourth of the employees who were examined at battery plants had lead poisoning. Almost one-third of the workers at an Indian plant making DDT, which increasingly has been restricted in the United States, were found to be sick. An Oxfam report cites 15,000 cases of pesticide poisoning in Sri Lanka in 1978, 1,000 of which resulted in death. There is a global double standard that places a greater value on Western lives. Corporations generally operate under laxer safety regulations in the Third World, as a recent issue of *Multinational Monitor* stated:

> U.S. chemical corporations . . . export from the U.S. at least 150 million pounds of pesticides each year that are totally prohibited, severely restricted, or never registered for use in this country. Oxfam estimates that 375,000 pesticide poisonings, 6,700 of which are fatal, occur each year in the Third World.
>
> Little noticed was the battery plant on the outskirts of Jakarta, Indonesia that was operated by Union Carbide. . . . At one point, more than half the work force of 750 were diagnosed as having a kidney disease linked to mercury exposure. Little noticed, too, was the mass poisoning in Al Basrah, Iraq in 1971. Cargoes of American barley and Mexican wheat arrived in Al Basrah treated with methylmercury, a fungicide prohibited for use in the U.S. and other countries. The grain, intended as seed only, had been chemically treated to prevent rot and had been sprayed with a bright pink dye to indicate the presence of the mercury solution. The shipments were not, however, marked in Arabic, the language of Iraq. The grain was sold to hundreds of thousands of Iraqis. One observer estimated that as many as 6,000 persons died and 100,000 were injured.

Americans have no guarantee of immunity from such tainted imports, for we consume fruit and coffee that enter the country after having been treated with dubious or banned chemicals. But it was the widespread spraying of Agent Orange over Vietnamese fields and jungles to destroy crops and deny cover to the enemy that brought Americans fully into the "circle of poison." Many Vietnam veterans have complained about skin diseases and birth defects in their children, which they suspect resulted from exposure to the defoliant. "I died in Vietnam and didn't even know it," said one terminal cancer victim. A class action suit filed in 1979 charged Dow, Monsanto and several smaller chemical manufacturers with withholding information about the toxic properties of dioxin, a byproduct of one of the principal herbicides (2,4,5-T) in Agent Orange. The defendants responded that they had been conscripted to fill military orders for one of the safest and most carefully studied agricultural products. Scientists recognize that the use of herbicides causes unbalanced growth in plants, which can destroy weeds and clear brush. But no one knows exactly how they work. The companies also insisted that the government knew at least as much as they did about the dangers inherent



DRAWINGS BY MARSHALL ARISMAN

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in these efforts to alter the chemistry of life. More than 200,000 individual claims have been filed since the recent settlement.

Dumping People Off the Land

America's abundant resources in relation to population size and its unfolding industrial prospects have helped sustain an excessive readiness to liberate people from agricultural work through chemistry (or, more accurately, to liberate work from people). In bringing about the shift from an agrarian economy to one devoted to the production of industrial goods and services, the major reliance was placed on the incentives of the marketplace. But many farmers, both whites and blacks, found themselves excluded from the rewards of individual opportunity. Today they continue to be more driven than lured from the old agrarian order. Corporate research and development as well as national farm policies and practices are oriented to agriculture as big business rather than to family farmers who respect the soil and want to live close to it. A lingering frontier ethic makes it difficult for Americans to perceive that the forced migration has been a major source of the urban crisis and its related racial tensions. It is less disturbing to accept these dislocations as technologically ordained than to analyze social forces and explore alternative possibilities. "Land reform" has an un-American ring. It remains esoteric terminology, reserved for less developed countries.

India, in contrast, has been burdened throughout its history by low productivity and poverty in what Mohandas Gandhi once described as "700,000 dung heaps which today pass muster as villages." At the time of its independence it also possessed a slender industrial base. Following their victory over the British, the leaders of the new nation turned to rebuild the rural economy in tandem with new machine-tool and heavy industries. Planned development was seen as the swiftest and surest path to economic reconstruction with social justice.

The adoption of Western agricultural methods to create the food surpluses needed to feed the cities resulted in the dumping of many farmers onto the fringes of urban areas. Although he wrote the following for an Indian publication in 1961, E.F. Schumacher might have been at Bhopal last December:

> It is a familiar sight in so-called underdeveloped countries to find somewhere, in the midst of great poverty and a primitive way of life, a gleaming, streamlined new factory, created by foreign private enterprise and producing consumer goods of just the kind that poor people need. Such a factory, as a factory, may be in no way inferior to anything that could be found in Western Europe or the United States, superbly equipped and well-managed and attaining, with native labour, as high a level of productivity as might be attained in the country of its origin. When inspecting the factory you might think you were in America. But you would not think so the moment you stepped outside. Not only that there might be a huge barbed wire fence, heavily guarded, around the whole property, but immediately outside the gates you might find a shanty town of the most miserable kind teeming with thousands of people most of whom are unemployed and do not seem to have a chance of ever finding regular employment of any kind. The contrast is so striking, even overwhelming, that you begin to wonder, not merely what this factory represents by itself—on this point the management have provided you with excellent and convincing literature—but what it means to the society into which it has been planted.

The displaced Indians have remained marginal producers and consumers. Meanwhile, three-fourths of the population of 720 million (expected to reach 1 billion by the year 2000) still dwell on the land. Nearly half those people live at a bare subsistence level.

The New Scientific Farming

As Americans recognize from the experiences of their own country, the Bhopal plant is part of an industrial process that integrates agriculture into the international business system. At its best, farming was a local nurturing activity by which those who loved the land worked with nature rather than, in E.B. White's phrase, attempting to beat it

MANY BHOPALS:
TECHNOLOGY OUT OF CONTROL

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A CALL TO ACT TO PREVENT WORLD WAR III: APRIL 29

The threat of world war is increasingly real and pressing. The recent past has witnessed an unprecedented increase in international tension and war preparations. The great powers stand toe to toe, openly building and boasting of their increased armaments. They intervene against popular struggles around the world, while at the same time a series of confrontation points between the great powers (and their proxies) burn like fuses capable of igniting a greater conflagration.

The military forces of the major powers are equipped with nuclear weapons at all levels, making it all but certain that any global conflict would be fought with these weapons of mass destruction. Target lists to annihilate whole nations have been drawn up and are continually revised. Beyond the hundreds of millions of deaths their use would cause, lies a future scarred by global climatic, ecological, and economic effects. Worldwide, many millions more who might have escaped the immediate effects of nuclear weapons will die of starvation and disease.

In this season of peril, all the governments continue to proclaim their peaceful intents and declare global nuclear war to be unthinkable. Yet their actions (and with increasing frequency their words as well) speak differently. The major powers continuously hone their war plans with new weapons tests and ever more realistic war games. New disarmament proposals are cynically designed to elicit rejection. Jingoistic appeals to national pride abound. Military-political moves and counter-moves force the situation to ever more dangerous heights. The U.S. government stands belligerently on the front lines of these moves to war. Crisis follows crisis in a spiral that cannot go on without resulting in the gravest of consequences.

Such an extraordinary situation requires an extraordinary response. Mass opposition and resistance to war must achieve new heights, and with the greatest urgency. Only the independent action of millions stepping onto the stage of history to resist can realistically speak to the enormity that looms before us. It is in this spirit of practical politics that we now call for a coordinated day of national action against war, a concerted day of "No Business As Usual" on April 29, 1985. A day that deliberately disrupts and shuts down as much as possible of the daily routine through which we are lurching toward global war. A day of diverse events across the country which include the activities of people of many nationalities and social backgrounds: the anti-nuclear and anti-interventionist movements, the rebellious youth, the women's movement, religious activists, immigrants and political exiles, academics, workers, those involved in the war machine itself, and others. With activities ranging from teach-ins and forums to civil disobedience and other creative forms of direct action, our joint actions will focus the attention of large sectors of society on this critical question and on the necessity to act, and will deliver a powerful message that we will **not** go along with the rulers down the road to World War III.

We who issue this call have taken part in many different ways in the movements against injustice, exploitation, and war. Among us we hold different political and philosophical analyses of the configurations of world power, the sources of wars through history, and the many fronts of struggle and tactics we must employ for social change. But we share the recognition that now it is time to unite to say **NO.** Precisely because:

They won't listen to reason,
They won't be bound by votes,
The governments must be stopped from launching World War III,
No matter what it takes!

Individuals' organization listed for identification purpose only

Emile De Antonio, *film director & writer*
Beverly Axelrod, *attorney & mediator*
Kodiak Barry, *member Yellow Thunder Camp & Twin Oaks Community*
Dana Beal, *Overthrow editorial collective*
Edward Willinsky Billups III, *actor, director, playwright*
Karl Bissinger, *anti-war activist, NY*
Laura Brown, *Director, Oakland Feminist Women's Health Center*
Robert McAfee Brown, *Prof. of Theology & Ethics, Pacific School of Religion*
Brown U. students & "citizens' arresters": *Anne Aleshire, John Costin, Christopher A. Ferguson, Sandor Katz, Rachel Phipps & Alicia Svigals*
Courtney Bullock, *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, S.F. State*
Kate Champa, *artist, resister & mother, Providence*
Robert Charlick, *Prof. of Political Science, Cleveland State*
Richard Chinn, *poet and gay activist, Chicago*
Onaje Chionesu, *member New Afrikan People's Organization*
Noam Chomsky, *Prof. of Linguistics, M.I.T.*
Jack & Felice Cohen-Joppa, *editors,* The Nuclear Resister
Melanie Collins, *DJ, "Leather Jacket," WRFG Atlanta*
Walter J. Collins, *once-imprisoned draft resister, Atlanta*
Paul Colomy, *Prof. of Sociology, Akron*
Grace Copperhead, Kalirose, Ann Lewis, Cathy Hope, Joyce Land & Carlyle Cesal, *Women's Encampment for Peace & Justice, Savannah River Plant 1983-4*
Sue Dana, *In His Name Affinity Group, Christians Opposed to the False God of Patriotism, Portland*
Arthur Davis, *Music Director, WREK Atlanta*
Gabriel Day, *Peace Resource Project, Santa Cruz*
George & Ruth Dear, *Oak Park War Resisters League*
Patrick S. Diehl & Ed Gehrman, *Livermore Action Group staff members*
Carl Dix, *Revolutionary Communist Party U.S.A.*
Carol Downer, *Fed. of Feminist Women's Health Centers*
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Ethan J. Felson, *Chm., Gay People at Lehigh U.*
Lillian Ford & Therese Forte, *Seattle Non-Violent Action Group*
Robin Foster & Andrea Doremus, *Romulus, NY*
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Don Freeman, *Vibration magazine co-publisher & editor, Cleveland*
Kris Fulsaas & Erin Moore, *Northwest Passage*
Teri Galvin, *NY MOBE*
John Gerassi, *author,* The Great Fear in Latin America
Louis Gianetti, *author, educator, Cleveland*
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Terri Hemmert, *DJ, Chicago*
Beatriz Johnston Hernandez, *journalist*
Robert Hernandez, *defense attorney Plowshares AVCO 8 & the Boston 18*
Doug Hoechst, *40 Watt Club, Athens, GA*
Abbie Hoffman, *activist & author*
Rich Hutchinson, *Disarm Now Action Group member, Chicago*
Marsha A. Jackson, *co-director Jomandi Productions, Atlanta*
Joey Johnson, *Revolutionary Commmunist Youth Brigade, convicted for "desecration of a venerated object" Dallas, 1985*
Sonia Johnson, *feminist, author & political activist*
Akil Al Jundi, *Attica Rebellion Organizing Committee & Fannie Lou Hamer Community Self-Defense Unit*
Aron Kay, *Youth International Party*
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Sherry Klink, *former reg'l. disarmament coordinator, Greenpeace Northwest*
Claudia Koonz, *historian*
Joel Kovel, *author,* Against The State Of Nuclear Terror
Paul Krassner, *author & editor,* The Best of The Realist
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Ben Masel, *Wisconsin Marijuana Political Action Committee*
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Honor Moore, *poet, Connecticut*
Mary K. Moore, *Bohemian Grove Action Network*
Charles R. Morrow, *med. student, Physicians for Social Responsibility*
Jay Murphy, *editor,* Red Bass *magazine*
Howard O. Nash, *pastor, United Methodist Church, Baltimore*
Richard Navies, *Dept. Chm. of African-American Studies, Berkeley H.S.*
Richard Newberger, *Revolutionary Communist Youth Brigade, Fort Mac 2*
Larry Noble, *Prof., Atlanta U.*
Jane Noll, *Washington War Resisters League & D.C. Women's Collective*
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Laurel Sercombe, *Northwest Nuclear Xchange board member*
Ntozake Shange, *poet-dancer*
Beverly Guy Sheftall, *feminist writer & professor, Black Women's Studies*
Ann Simonton, *Myth California organizing comm., feminist activist/writer*
Clark Smith, *Winter Soldier Archives*
Chuck Speta, *anarchist & Republican War Chest Tourist, Gainesville, FL*
Benjamin Spock, M.D.
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Akinyele Umoja, *Nat'l. Sec'y., New Afrikan People's Organization*
Joy Umoja, *member New Afrikan People's Organization, educator*
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Ginger Varney, *journalist*
Antonio Velasquez, *community organizer, Santa Barbara*
Lloyd K. Wake, *minister, Glide Memorial United Methodist Church, Japanese-American interned under Executive Order 9066*
Cathy Wardford, *Black internationalist revolutionary, Atlanta*
Kim Wardford, *worker, Republic of New Afrika*
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Geoff Yippie!, *Abalone Alliance, People's Law School*
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Joe Zone, *organizer, Republican War Chest Tour*

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8 Democratic War Chest Tourists & 4 Republican War Chest Tourists; 43 students and 2 professors, Antioch College, OH; 28 people at the Brown University NBAU Conference; 146 students and 32 faculty members, Columbia College, Chicago; 70 students, Kent State University; 10 students, Sunset High School S.D.S. chapter, Beaverton, OR; 11 students, Paidia School, GA; 6 Emory University professors; 2 Georgia State professors; 16 punks at a Suicidal Tendencies show in Boston.

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into submission. Now farming has become largely an extractive industry, responsive to global market fluctuations and controls.

Pesticides have been central to the transformation. They are used to protect crops from insects and rodents in the field and in storage. Similarly, herbicides ward off diseases and parasitic plants. The bumper yields resulting from this "scientific" agriculture are, at least in the short run, impressive. According to Union Carbide, pesticides save about 10 percent of India's annual food crop, enough to feed more than 70 million people. But the price is heavy. Indiscriminate or poorly planned use of chemical pesticides has reduced the soil's nutrients, the plants' natural resistance to disease and the land's ability to retain moisture. The standard response to these warnings from nature has been to step up the application of fertilizer and to intensify irrigation, increasing the runoff of chemical-laden soil, which contaminates waterways and aquatic life.

More than twenty years ago Rachel Carson sounded the alarm about the dangers to animals and humans of pesticides like DDT. Yet the destruction of species continues, including those that prey on many pests. As Carson noted, the pests have developed increased resistance to many of the magical chemicals, and hardier breeds have consequently emerged.

The new agricultural order is also dependent on high-yield, genetically identical crops or those having only a few strains. Such crops are grown from hybrid seeds which the farmer purchases each year from seed companies, many of them now controlled by oil and petrochemical corporations, including Union Carbide. Artificial fertilizer and pesticides are needed to increase the productivity of the seeds; also, it is more cost effective to sow and spray a broad, one-crop field by machine. All those techniques heighten the crop's vulnerability to insects or disease, raising the possibility of catastrophic losses for the farmer. In contrast, as the Council on Environmental Quality, poet-farmer Wendell Berry and others have pointed out, a more diversified agriculture with crop rotation and care by experienced farmers can deal with such dangers naturally.

Scientific farming, together with expensive, high-powered machines, requires a substantial capital outlay. The farmer borrows the money, adding interest to his fixed costs. Productivity becomes his overriding concern. The concentration of agricultural holdings accelerates as small farmers are forced out and those who survive grow dependent on the banks, the government and overseas markets. Rural people are removed from the land as effectively as they were by the British enclosure acts of the eighteenth century and the forced collectivization in the Soviet Union.

The output of the factories in the field is generally celebrated as a triumph of technology wed to scientific management—the Green Revolution. American textbooks glowingly record how one mechanized (and now computerized) farmer feeds x times as many consumers as he did in Thomas Jefferson's day. We still pay homage to the sage of Monticello for his democratic ideals, but we have forgotten his dictum that broadly diffused land ownership is essential for an independent citizenry. Similarly, the people of India often forget Gandhi's precept that independence must begin at the bottom, with every village self-sufficient. Even less is said about what the return in healthy crops might be from a balanced husbandry with educated farmers, aided by the best tools and by renewable resources, intensively working manageable holdings, individually and cooperatively.

The emerging agribusiness is hooked on chemicals produced from nonrenewable fossil fuels. The farmer, encouraged by the interlocking research network of scientists, academics and industry-backed development centers with professional stakes in such dependence, becomes tightly linked to the international petrochemical and energy industry. Union Carbide has been an integral part of this structure. The third-largest chemical company in the United States (after Du Pont and Dow), its $9.5 billion in sales placed it thirty-fifth among the 1985 Fortune 500, and its assets of $10.5 billion make it the twenty-third largest in that category. While consumers are familiar with its Eveready batteries, Prestone antifreeze and Glad wrap, its primary dealings in chemicals, gases, plastics, metals, technological processes, uranium research and, until recently, enrichment, have been with other corporations and governments. It has plants, mills, mines and laboratories in thirty-eight countries, and it is a major supplier for the $7 billion pesticide market.

Union Carbide owns a 50.9 percent share of the Bhopal plant, well over the 40 percent limit on foreign ownership set by India. This compromise by the Indian government, which preferred a state-owned industrial sector, was attributed to the country's need for high technology and the multinational's superior bargaining position. (Also, co-ownership can temper popular pressures for nationalization, often without surrendering basic technological knowledge.) The remainder of the shares are held by Indian interests. After the disaster, Union Carbide was quick to emphasize that Union Carbide India Ltd. (U.C.I.L.), of which the pesticide facilities are a part, is managed by Indians and operates as a totally separate company. Yet the American corporation has an executive vice president on U.C.I.L.'s board. U.C.I.L., with headquarters in Bombay, reports directly to Union Carbide Eastern, in Hong Kong. Four executives of Union Carbide Eastern, including its chair, sit on the Indian company's board. Budgets, major capital expenditures, policy decisions and company reports must be cleared with the Danbury, Connecticut, headquarters. While precise details about the working relationships are beginning to emerge from the litigation, the central issue when appraising the accident is more than one of formal ownership. After all, Pemex, successor to international corporate oil operations that were nationalized by Mexico in 1938, an event still marked as a national holiday in that country, is owned by the government.

Secret Lethal Substances

Union Carbide was producing the highly toxic chemical methyl isocyanate as a component of its pesticide Sevin. Pesticides are designed to kill, and although the intent may

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be selective, the consequences often are not. All kinds of life may be threatened by such chemicals. In humans they cause liver damage, nervous-system dysfunction, respiratory failure, cancer and genetic defects, among other ailments. Rachel Carson concluded that a more appropriate name for them would be biocides.

Field, factory and warehouse workers throughout the world are exposed daily to lethal chemicals about which they may understand little, other than that their eyes tear, they cough harshly and they suffer recurring rashes and headaches. In the United States, the hard-won laws of the 1970s—the Environmental Protection Act, the Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act—along with other laws, provide some safety standards for regulating toxic chemicals and wastes in the workplace and in the community. Pesticides must be reviewed and registered before being put on the market.

Manufacturers have resisted such procedures, claiming they interfere with progress and profits. They insist that the ingredients of their products are proprietary information and that disclosure of such trade secrets upsets competition. They have warned local communities, as Union Carbide did in Marietta, Ohio, in 1971, that clean-air laws would result in layoffs or shutdowns. They have also said such regulation of pesticides jeopardizes the world food supply.

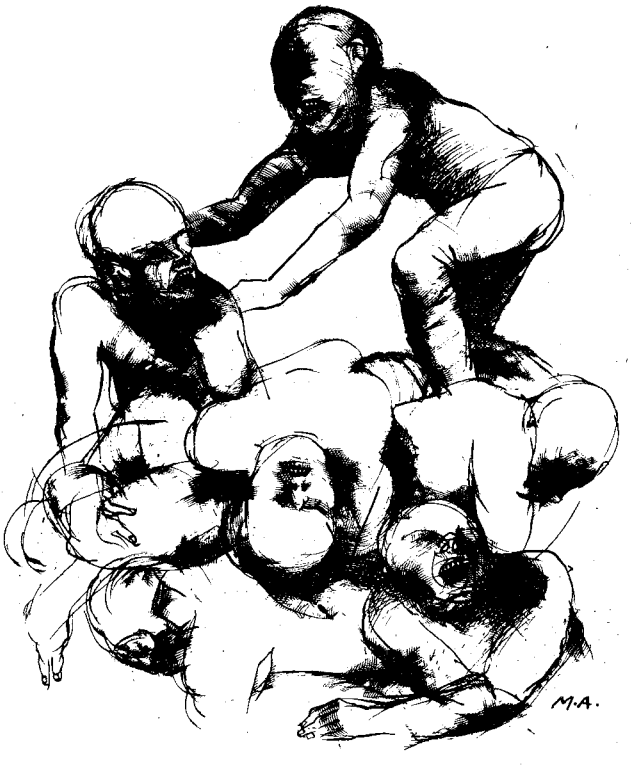
The Reagan Administration has used budget cuts and cost-benefit analysis to curtail enforcement of environmental laws. Scientists and administrators sympathetic to the laws have been purged, and the industry, rather than the public, has become the constituency of the regulatory agencies. Corporate officials have been invited to participate in the regulatory process, reviewing projects, budgets and reports in their early stages. A conscious effort has been made to reduce public information and involvement.

A policy of industry self-policing has resulted in fraudulent and inadequate testing and has kept questionable pesticides on the market. Henry Waxman, chair of the House Subcommittee on Health and the Environment, which held hearings on the safety of Union Carbide's West Virginia plant, concluded that although the Environmental Protection Agency has no idea what is going on inside such facilities, "it blithely reassures the public that they are safe." The E.P.A. has made no attempt to regulate underground storage of chemicals like methyl isocyanate and has not set waste-emission standards, thus making it easier to claim with a straight face that no violations have taken place. Even after Bhopal the agency continues to give the review of MIC a low priority, explaining, "It is never expected to be emitted into the air under normal circumstances." As a top E.P.A. administrator reasoned, "You can't predict against a random incident like what happened over in Bhopal."

According to Jonathan Lash's *A Season of Spoils*, published last year, "Of 600 registered generic pesticides in common use today, 79 to 84 percent have not been adequately tested for their potential to cause cancer, 60 to 70 percent have not been tested for their potential to cause birth defects, and 90 percent have not been tested for genetic mutations." The substantial cancer-producing effects of ethylene dibromide (EDB) as a grain, fruit and soil fumigant have been played down. One E.P.A. official proposed giving pesticides a better image. Labeling them "hazardous" and "toxic," he explained, conveys "a lack of trust in the producer of the chemicals, the government which regulates the industry and the applicators who apply these chemicals." His suggestion: refer to them as "crop protection chemicals." Joan Claybrook and the staff of Public Citizen note in their recent *Retreat From Safety* that chemicals and pesticides "are presumed safe until proven dangerous." And judging by the frequency of authorizations for emergency use of banned or unregistered pesticides, "an observer might conclude that the election of Ronald Reagan has sparked a nationwide insect outbreak."

The Bhopal disaster has prompted groups in a number of states to press for the introduction or strengthening of "right to know" laws which require that the public be informed about chemical and other potentially dangerous plant operations. Labor unions continue to fight for accurate labeling of the chemicals workers handle, training in their use, and power to close down unsafe operations.

In contrast, the petrochemical industry laments the emotional fallout from the Indian disaster. "The public's fear of toxic chemicals is grossly exaggerated but nevertheless it is very real," Edwin Holmer, chair of the Chemical Manufacturers Association and president of Exxon Chemical, warned a National Academy of Engineering symposium at Stanford University last month. "This fear can be translated into laws and regulations so punitive and so excessively expensive that they would make our operations prohibitive, make new products difficult to develop and commercialize, and make our industry noncompetitive in the international trade



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arena." On March 27, *The New York Times* reported that officers of major chemical companies, "reversing their longtime position, joined members of Congress . . . in calling for stricter Government controls over toxic air pollutants." Warren Anderson, chair of Union Carbide, urged Congress "to improve regulatory control over hazardous air pollutants" through "uniform, nationwide and coordinated standards" which would assure communities the right to know about hazardous chemicals in their vicinity. Other corporate voices have suggested nationwide health and safety regulations. Given the political climate under the Reagan Administration, such rules and their enforcement would be relatively tame, and they would take precedence over tougher regulations pushed through by local community groups. Thus does corporate America move in the wake of Bhopal to define the parameters of national debate and policy, while asserting that we are all in it together when it comes to concern about unruly chemicals.

In New Jersey, a pioneering Worker and Community Right to Know Act, effective last August, was challenged in Federal court by the state Chamber of Commerce and major chemical and oil corporations. They argued that OSHA regulations, which require description of the hazards but not specific identification of chemicals (presumably to protect trade secrets), pre-empt the new state legislation, which requires precise chemical labeling and registration. In a partial victory for business, the court held that the law cannot be applied to the petrochemical industry or other manufacturers. The labor/environmental coalition that fought for the act is mobilizing for new state legislation. Meanwhile, representatives of the companies involved in the suit, all of which have been charged by state or Federal agencies with releasing hazardous substances into the environment, sit on the state's Right to Know Advisory Council, which was created to oversee implementation of the law. Heading the eleven-member council is the manager of safety and environmental affairs for the Specialty Chemicals Division of Union Carbide.

Third World nations ardently pursuing industrial and agricultural development are even less rigorous in evaluating potential risks from chemical plants and imported chemicals. (Pollution is a disease of the affluent, it is sometimes said. And the preoccupation with the environment is their privileged indulgence.) Developing nations often lack the resources for independent appraisal and control of pesticides, and some have become pollution havens for multinational corporations. About 29 percent of the 522 million pounds of pesticides shipped from the United States in 1976 was not registered for domestic use, according to a 1979 General Accounting Office report. About 20 percent of those unregistered pesticides had been suspended or canceled by the E.P.A. because of health or environmental risks. And some 25 percent of the products exported either had never been studied or had been deemed too hazardous for use in the United States. A 1984 environmental study of development in Malaysia reveals that test data for fifty-

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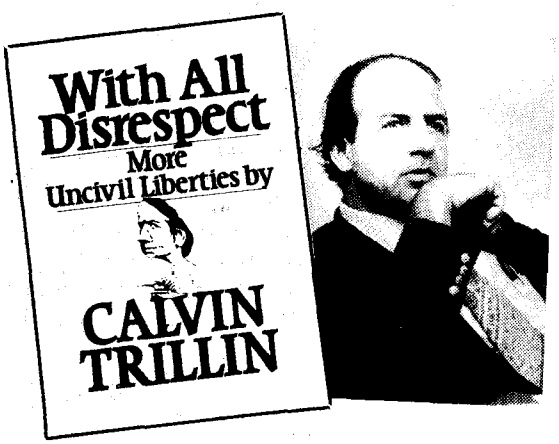

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six pesticides imported from the United States had been deliberately falsified.

Attempts to publicize adverse findings and curb such exports have been opposed by corporations as unwarranted intrusions on the free market. The Administration contends that this country must not become a "global nanny" and combats U.N. efforts to restrict the dumping of unsafe pesticides. Even while the Bhopal story was on the front pages, the United States was the only nation in the General Assembly (the vote was 148 to 1) to oppose the continued publication of a reference directory of restricted or banned pesticides. It argued that the $89,000 expenditure was wasteful and discriminated against the companies listed.

In the headlong rush to industrialize, it is sometimes forgotten that the purpose of the emerging global food system is to meet basic human needs, not to advance technical prowess or promote corporate expansion. The urban consumer has been integrated into that food system, trained to accept as food a growing number of synthetic or chemically treated products, whether artificially ripened, tasteless tomatoes, beguilingly labeled "vine grown," or squeezable bread made with fumigated grain, from which much of the nutrition and most of the taste have been removed. "It is one of the miracles of science and hygiene," Wendell Berry has observed, "that the germs that used to be in our food have been replaced by poisons."

Every day we read that farmers in this country find it increasingly difficult to survive. Yet as food becomes more expensive to produce, process, package and transport, the likelihood diminishes that the hungry of the world, including the rural poor, will be the ones to eat better or more. The grim irony of this organizational achievement is that in many regions of the world, single crops are produced for export in order to earn the foreign exchange to pay for technical sophistication. Where that happens, the bulk of the farm population may remain as underemployed industrial field hands, vulnerable to the profit expectations of a remote international order which snuffs out their livelihood as well as their life.

Who Was to Blame in Bhopal?

Warren Anderson's disclaimer—"It never entered my mind that an accident such as Bhopal could happen"—begs the question of culpability. Although Anderson insisted that the $20 million "state of the art" MIC facility left "nothing . . . to be desired" technologically, considerable evidence of corporate neglect, stupidity, arrogance and greed has surfaced. An affidavit from Edward A. Munoz, a former high-level official of Union Carbide who was active in the development of the Bhopal plant and had been managing director of U.C.I.L., describes how the engineering department of the American company was responsible for the conceptualization and the design work of the plant. It monitored the engineering and construction and pushed to store the highly volatile chemical in large bulk tanks. It "imposed" that procedure over the objections of U.C.I.L.,

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which he represented. While experts and lawyers are determining how water entered the MIC storage tank, producing the buildup of temperature and pressure beyond safe levels, others are wondering about the extent of fundamental flaws in the plant's design and instrumentation.

For a few days prior to the accident, workers had been unable to pressurize with nitrogen a storage tank in order to move the MIC to the nearby pesticide production facility. The amount of MIC in the tank exceeded specifications. It was unclear by which route the nitrogen left the tank. Meanwhile, safety systems failed to work or were bypassed by the escaping MIC. A cooling unit had been shut down; a vent scrubber to neutralize escaping gas with a caustic soda solution was also inoperative (it has been charged that its capacity would have been inadequate anyway); and a flare tower to burn off escaping gas was not working.

At the time of the accident, Anderson said that safety precautions for working with MIC were the same at Institute and Bhopal. Union Carbide spokesmen have since explained that safety equipment and procedures in Bhopal were less sophisticated, in part to provide more jobs. Although the MIC unit was closed for maintenance the day of the fatal leak, it is obvious that the Indian management had routinely cut corners on upkeep and safety. Workers reported that critical valves did not always respond and defective fail-safe mechanisms were not promptly replaced. They had learned to accept the gauges as unreliable. Operating crews had been cut back. A maintenance engineer had been dropped from each shift. Warnings from workers, their local unions and the press were ignored. Two years previous the union representing most of the plant's 632 workers had put up thousands of posters predicting the release of toxic vapor over Bhopal. "Nobody listened," one maintenance supervisor said, and there were inadequate responses to earlier inspection reports from the American parent. It has also been disclosed that for some time the international company had been searching quietly for a buyer for its holding because of disappointing financial returns. Production was down and the plant lost more than $4 million last year.

Inspection by the Indian government was casual and possibly corrupt. The State of Madhya Pradesh did little to insure that the plant had adequate warning and evacuation plans for the work force and the community. C. Arjun Singh, the state's Chief Minister, who was responsible for the speedy arrest of Anderson and of the two top officers of U.C.I.L., cited their "criminal liability" for this "cruel and wanton negligence." Yet in 1982, after leaks had caused several accidents and one death, he rejected calls to shut down the facility, reminding petitioners of its importance to the economy. "We cannot suddenly shift or close down factories. The Bhopal plant is safe and will always be safe."

The billions of dollars in liability suits Union Carbide faces far exceed its insurance coverage, and initially there were doubts about the company's ability to avoid bankruptcy. But Anderson expressed confidence to a Congressional committee that "the victims can be fairly and equitably compensated without a material adverse effect on the financial condition of Union Carbide Corporation." The company had no intention of seeking the protection of Federal bankruptcy laws, as the Manville Corporation had done after it was inundated by lawsuits from victims of asbestos poisoning. At a meeting with investment analysts shortly after the news came from India, and in a subsequent letter to stockholders, officials announced that the quarterly dividend was safe.

Net income for fiscal 1984 was $323 million, up from $79 million the previous year, when Union Carbide was covering the costs of closing some of its petrochemical facilities. Earnings per share were $4.59, up from $1.13. The beleaguered company has maneuvered to reach settlements or to have the suits tried in Indian courts, where lifetime earnings and hence compensation would be estimated much lower than they would be in the United States. Obviously no sum will compensate for the lost lives, and neither India nor the United States has laws for holding corporations and governments accountable for shattered families, despoiled resources and ravaged communities.

During the early 1970s, Union Carbide's lack of concern about the environment earned it a reputation for being indifferent to public opinion. Since the accident, *Business Week* has awarded Anderson high marks as a business diplomat for his courage in promptly flying to the scene to gather facts, arrange relief and head off lawsuits. There, in a sequence worthy of Brecht, after his arrest and speedy release on bail, he pledged financial aid and offered to convert the company's modern guest house, in which he had been detained, into an orphanage.

Capitalism rewards corporations not for taking risks but for shifting them. The social costs of pesticide production have been transferred beyond corporate fences, beyond national boundaries, beyond the lifetime of executives and stockholders. What economists call externalities are now other people's pain.

To dwell on Bhopal as a regrettable accident is to learn little from the experience. American chemical corporations are capital intensive and employ relatively few workers; overall, their safety records are considered good compared with many other industries. Union Carbide has introduced new safety mechanisms and organizational procedures in Institute and undoubtedly will in Bhopal, should that plant ever reopen. The company has considerable experience and a cash stake in an efficient operation. And where governmental agencies have responsibility for reviewing these precautions, there will be new vigilance, sharpened by an awareness that they may be under the scrutiny of a morally aroused public.

'Normal' Accidents

Large questions about the limits of technology remain. Intervening in the natural order with only partial understanding of relationships and consequences is always a chancy business. Too often we trust untested processes which reveal their flaws only when the casualties come in. The Bhopal plant's operating manual contains a brief and not very helpful discussion of how to deal with major leaks which concludes, "We will learn more and more as we gain

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actual experience." Public health experts admit they have done little research on many of the chemicals involved in making pesticides, including methyl isocyanate.

The extremely adverse effects of much of the normal usage and handling of chemicals seldom command front pages, at least not until their cumulative impact becomes impossible to ignore. The spectacular breakup of a supertanker is featured news; prior understanding of the profit considerations shaping its construction and performance would remove the element of surprise. Floating oil slicks, the increasing industrial pollution of the ocean and the daily practices of tankers along major shipping lanes are not considered news. Giant irrigation projects, including the Aswan Dam on the Nile and those in California's Central Valley, are cited as triumphs of energetic civilizations because of the magnificent increases in arable land and yields. There is less discussion of how they waterlog the soil or how the heavy salts deposited on the surface ultimately will threaten productivity, unless complex and costly draining is introduced.

Some areas of technology, like nuclear power and recombinant DNA experiments, are attracting public attention because of their high potential for disaster. This despite assurances from many reputable scientists that those frontier research areas, although certainly not accident proof, are expertly controlled. As Charles Perrow points out in his 1984 book *Normal Accidents*, the public's gut fear of catastrophe should be heeded. His study offers an illuminating framework for understanding what happened at Bhopal. When potentially toxic or explosive raw materials are chemically transformed (what Lewis Mumford calls the resynthesis of nature), the risks are great. In production systems involving a relatively loose coupling of stages, each of which has the space for its own process to unfold and to incorporate shocks, engineers are able to isolate the breakdown of the component parts. The elements of an assembly line may be loosely or tightly linked, but since only linear reactions take place, it is relatively easy to pinpoint difficulty and close down the line or temporarily bypass the trouble spot. These systems, Perrow writes, tend to have preventable or manageable accidents. In contrast, complex technological systems, with their tightly coupled units and feedback loops, have baffling and not immediately comprehensible interactions occurring in a not necessarily predictable sequence. Multiples of sometime small failures, making unexpected connections and moving along unplanned or hidden paths, may set off a large and catastrophic accident, leaving the managers uncertain about how or where to intervene. (In chemical plants, such reactions are almost instantaneous.) Warnings can get swamped by a medley of signals "that fit our expectations, and thus can be discounted as 'noise' in the system," Perrow writes. And, he asks, what does one do when, as happens quite frequently, "warning systems do not warn us that they can no longer warn us?"

The conventional explanations presented after Bhopal and other disasters, blaming design or operator failure, may be inadequate and deceptive, as is the rationalization that no system is perfect. The trouble certainly lies not in Indian

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genes but in Western industrial systems. Hence, accidents may be "normal," and we may not always learn enough from them to avoid future ones—indeed, nuclear power accidents can be expected to increase. Many mishaps have been concealed from the public by governments and corporations. Three Mile Island came close to being a holocaust. As Perrow writes, nuclear power "is quite new and has not been given a chance to reveal its full potential for danger." He concludes that because the risks outweigh the benefits, we should shut down all nuclear power plants.

Does that analysis apply to pesticide plants? Surely they can be made safer. There are less hazardous (if, perhaps, less profitable) chemical substitutes for MIC, and there are also alternatives to storing large amounts of unstable chemicals, as was done at the Bhopal plant. Given the tightly coupled nature of the petrochemical production process, however, Perrow's argument that systems accidents are inevitable is compelling.

The search for alternative technological and organizational systems and safeguards in pesticide manufacture will continue, but the wisdom of producing and using such chemicals has yet to be addressed. A pest-free agricultural abundance is an attractive prospect but not if it entails making the world ecologically less stable and depleting fossil fuels to produce the pesticides.

The continued use of complex systems and the related search to make them fail-safe, as well as the acceptance of accidents as fate, will increase the centralization of bureaucratic controls and the dependence on distant offices. Computers encourage the assumption that the radius of effective control can be extended bit by bit until technological and organizational breakdowns are eliminated.

Yet complex organizations may generate more error rather than less. And, as Perrow suggests, individuals on the scene in decentralized operations are more likely to anticipate errors and correct them if they occur. Certainly the Bhopal story has something to add here, given the workers' uneasiness about conditions in the plant and the union's warnings to management and the state government about the possibility of disaster. On March 20, several weeks before the Indian government brought suit against Union Carbide in a United States Federal court on behalf of the victims, the company released a study by a team of scientists and engineers which found that "this incident was the result of a unique combination of unusual events." The "events and circumstances" of what went wrong at Bhopal, explained Anderson, "were not in compliance with standard operating procedures." But safety was the responsibility of the Indian personnel. It was "a local issue." Anderson added that while it disturbed him tremendously "that any Union Carbide plant could have operated with such total disregard for procedures . . . you can't run a . . . $10 billion corporation all out of Danbury. You can't be there day in and day out, week in and week out." Nevertheless, "the appropriate people" at Union Carbide "should have known." In contrast, the company said, the Institute plant was well run and very safe. Indeed it has been made safer: "a Bhopal-type situation is inconceivable."

Responsibility is so often blurred in big organizations that its precise locus is concealed from the rulers as well as the ruled. Nevertheless, those in corporate, political and military authority in the United States are driven to transcend all known limits to attain the ultimate pesticide, the ultimate industrial process for production and profits, the ultimate weapons and the ultimate defense systems against an adversary who only seeks the same. The objective is effective control; the consequence is authoritarian madness.

In reviewing what went wrong at Bhopal, industrial experts have placed human errors caused by carelessness, ignorance, confusion and fright high on the list. Although the larger issue of democratic accountability appears uncomfortably ideological to the business world, the need for disciplined, predictable human behavior does not. "You can design the best system," the technical director of the Chemical Manufacturers Association contended, "but when you deal with people you can create a problem." To others, speculating whether human beings are becoming obsolete in industrial development is academic—particularly in populous countries like India. The heart of the matter is not careful training or automation. It is assumed that workers from traditional agricultural societies can be taught to perform specific tasks, but because of their lack of sufficient experience with industrialization, they are considered incapable of coping with breakdowns. As an official of the United Nations Environment Program explained, in an unfortunate choice of words, "They have not internalized the technological culture."

At the same time that experts were crafting explanations in the United States, survivors in Bhopal were still burying the dead and trying to put their broken lives back together. When the alarm had sounded on the day of the accident, some of them had raced from their homes to help put out what they thought was a fire. That was the innocence of their former lives. They now know that Union Carbide India Ltd. was not producing medicine for the soil or for humans.

The Faustian Dream of Science

The issue Bhopal presents is not technology versus no technology. But technology is never neutral; its use always has consequences. The engineering mentality assumes that technological problems will be solved by more technology and its improved administration, that we can bank on what conservative philosopher Herman Kahn viewed as "the curative possibilities inherent in technological and economic progress."

This Faustian faith in the ultimate technological fix invokes the ideals of scientific inquiry, imaginative and free-spirited, beholden only to the disciplined search for truth. "What science has to teach us," Jacob Bronowski wrote some thirty years ago, defending its contribution even amid the ruins of Nagasaki, "is not its techniques but its spirit: the irresistible need to explore." Dispassionate inquiry, what Veblen called idle curiosity, is an indispensable element of creative work, and it can enhance the lives of all. As scientists expand our knowledge of the behavior of micro-

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organisms in the soil, we may discover that there are peaceful alternatives to the pesticidal violence against nature that erupted at Bhopal to become violence against humans.

But science is also deeply embedded in society. Public and private funding tends to go to proposals that accord with prevailing systems of belief and power. The commercial potential of herbicides and pesticides made them more attractive than natural alternatives like microorganisms that prey on unwanted weeds and insects. Chemicals have the added attraction of military utility. That preference may shift with the heightened interest in biological warfare and the prospects for big profits from bioengineering. The celebration of applied research downplays how heavily, and often secretly, science draws on our national resources in support of often morally indefensible goals of the state and of corporate empires. A science pledged to technology is indifferent to the environment within which it functions, whether in Bhopal or Institute. Promising "more" for all of us, it forestalls moves toward a modicum of economic justice for each of us.

Fundamental science should be cherished; its open deliberations, like those of a free society, are humankind's first defense against the tyranny of established ignorance. But people must have the right to know what hazards science has created. They didn't at Séveso, at Three Mile Island, at Love Canal. The immediate consequence of not knowing was that local health and fire departments could not prepare for the "unlikely" or know what to do when the "impossible" happened, as at Bhopal. Technological decisions that will affect communities should first be debated by the people who live there. If we are to be participating citizens rather than enthralled consumers with whom experts play Russian roulette, we cannot permit petrochemical companies to conceal information behind the claim of "proprietary rights," akin to the government's claim of "national security."

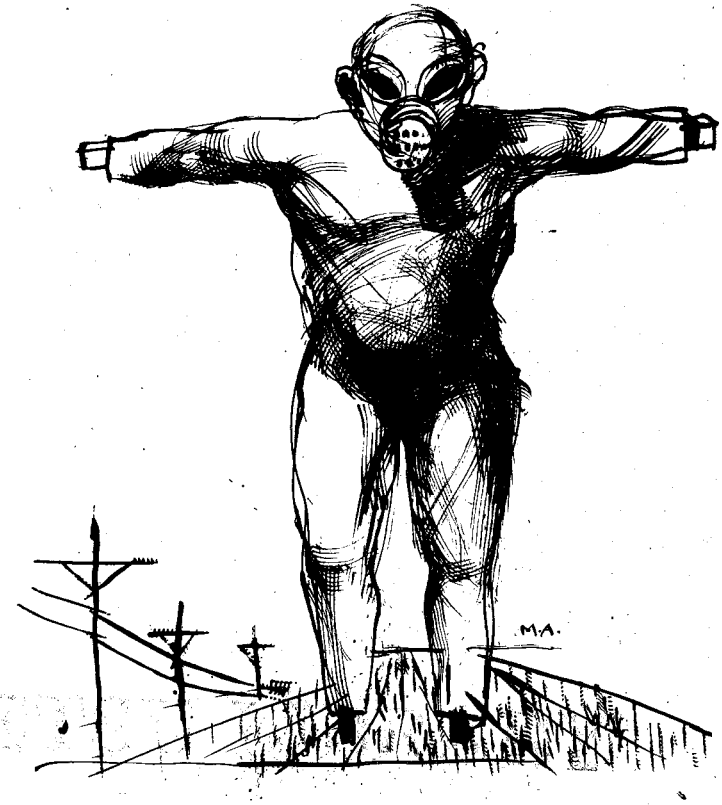
Gandhi's Truth

The tragedy of Bhopal challenges us to ask basic questions: Technology for what ends, with what limits, susceptible to what constraints and to whose controls? The temptation to do things because they can be done and are profitable must be countered by a humbler commitment to understand the needs of mankind and then ask what might be helpful. An appreciation of the richness and pride of the world's many cultures, and the right of all people to worthwhile employment and to wholesome food, the end of gross inequalities of opportunity and power, a firm foundation for peaceful relations with nature and one's fellow human beings, the right of coming generations to find a plentiful and unravaged earth on which they can live in freedom—these are among the more broadly accepted goals for a responsible technology.

Gandhi posed moral and political concerns when appraising the likely impact of industrialization on daily life. One need not accept his complete philosophy, including the sometimes blanket condemnation of machinery, to comprehend his fears that his country would embrace technology indiscriminately. He imagined Indian society as an association of independent villages, each a democratic polis of about 1,000 citizens, whose economic and cultural resources would be utilized along peaceful, cooperative principles. He believed that a healthy rural India could better withstand a foreign invasion than an urban one with huge factories, enslaved mill hands, a top-heavy central government and a highly equipped professional army.

He feared dependence on foreign economic forces whose control of the industrial process would give them control of all social processes. He related artificial chemical fertilizers to a desire for quick returns, heedless of eventual soil exhaustion, and he saw that pesticide use served absentee owners interested in the profits from shipping crops long distances. His answer again was regional self-sufficiency. Heavy machinery was acceptable where human effort was inadequate for the task, but such machinery had to be controlled by government for the public good, lest it enrich the few and displace the many. If Gandhi's plan appears to condemn millions to drudgery, one must remember that his focus was on the enforced idleness of the bulk of the population, who lived on the border of starvation.

Following independence, India's leaders knew that their socialist model required planned economic development and rapid mechanization. They wanted this planning to be democratic and to respect community values derived from tradition and Gandhi's political vision. With a series of five-year plans, India made sizable strides in its industrial revolution. The task was so overwhelming, however, that the planners became frustrated and felt they were not making sufficient impact on the squalor in which the masses, rural and now also urban, lived. Nor had they succeeded in radi-



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cally altering the structure of the economy. They increasingly wanted capital and technology from overseas, and they wanted to cut down on the exchange drain of imports. But the arrangements were often unfavorable to India, especially when corporations preferred to guard their technical know-how.

The pesticide plant in Bhopal thus did not spring up as a weed from the soil. Nor was it washed up on the shores of India by chance. Although the terms have yet to be disclosed fully, it was a product of an agreement between a government hungry for "advanced" technology and a corporation looking overseas for markets and profits.

Lessons of Bhopal for the U.S.

In the United States the most valuable first step would be to reappraise the overextended and irresponsible aspects of the domestic political economy. Questions about technology are very much in order, despite the remarkable achievements seen in this abundant land. Americans must challenge the assumption that the marketplace is the sole arbiter of what technologies should be introduced at home and the assertion that their transfer abroad is a private affair, except perhaps when the government raises the flag of national security. Decisions on what basic technologies are needed and how and where they are to be introduced must involve people in the affected communities and workplaces. Conversely, if it is decided that the plant at Institute and its products are too dangerous and should be phased out (a concern among residents), alternative employment or income protection must be provided so that the costs of environmental moral outrage are not shifted to those dependent on the pesticide industry for their livelihood. A search for benign alternative technologies is essential. But unless we insist on technologies that do not further the concentration of industrial control, we may be introducing simply another technological fix, even if it is more desirable than those that prevail under the present business system.

Much of this effort will require public planning. To many Americans the term "planning" raises the specter of unaccountable bureaucrats drafting blueprints that only they can understand and apply. Yet the private sector and the military employ extensive planning. Union Carbide did in penetrating the Third World. Such private planning exercises considerable control over our lives. If technological decisions are to be dealt with democratically they must be brought into the political process, and on levels where citizens can be involved. Establishing the Bhopal plant was a political decision; only the citizens were excluded.

The tragedy gives credibility to the fear that the human race may perish by its own violent cleverness. The continued tribal thumpings of national leaders, armed with unprecedented means to engineer weapons and public assent, who demand that other nations knuckle under, does nothing to lessen such concern. Bhopal was murder, if not genocide. To mumble "Sorry" and offer cash is an intolerable response in light of the organized effort that profited from the conditions that produced the disaster. To accept the proposition that people of less technologically advanced regions, abroad and at home, are unfortunate but necessary industrial fodder so that the rest of us may progress to unlimited splendor is unconscionable. It suggests how much we have yet to learn about our common humanity, how genuine freedom may have to be shared before it can be thoroughly lived and enjoyed.

A deeper fear is that we will continue to accept such authority and its pervasive myths. The consolidation of power over nature in the name of science and service to mankind surrenders social power to technicians and their institutional masters, who have no special sensitivity to human needs and certainly no sanction to serve as guardians of humanity's future. If we concede that vast, complex and unlimited expansion is technologically inevitable and ultimately desirable, we cut ourselves off from nature, other human beings and ultimately ourselves. Accepting the image of ourselves as incompetent and powerless, we abdicate our obligation to shape history.

An alternative vision for a peaceful and productive world requires the emergence of the political will to insist that a future of unlimited technological growth, self-anointed managers and "normal" accidents is unworthy of the best in human potential and may well be unendurable. There is already vigorous resistance everywhere from people determined to live as though it mattered. One finds them in India: for example, the women of a village who linked hands to protect a stand of trees that was to be chopped down. In saving the forest from further destruction by outside timber merchants the women gave economic hope to their community. And they sparked a rural grass-roots movement called Chipko (meaning "embraced"). Green, environmental and antinuclear organizations in Europe and the United States, along with worker health, safety and economic democracy groups, are all asking that technology be brought to account. How to move from resistance to reconstruction remains the challenge.

E.F. Schumacher, who devoted much of his life to the search for technologies appropriate to satisfying work and responsible institutions, had a suggestion for beginning. Like Gandhi, he feared the potential for disaster in highly concentrated technological systems. He rejected a Keynesian model of unlimited expansionism powered by human selfishness as a suitable path to an abundance that only then would allow the luxury of ethical considerations. The global emergence of a privileged technocracy and a permanent underclass troubled him. National planning seemed too monstrous to control, and Gandhi's village idyll was too limited to produce the diversity necessary for a good life. In terms reminiscent of Pëtr Kropotkin, Albert Einstein and Paul Goodman, he wrote: "Any third-rate engineer or researcher can increase complexity; but it takes a certain flair of real insight to make things simple again."

Whether for the production of food for all, the generation of energy from renewable sources or the peaceful and democratic governance of our communities, the struggle to retain our humanity may require nothing less than a technology bound by human-size institutions committed to the goals of a just world. □

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

A Guide to Horrors

ARTHUR C. DANTO

The 1985 Biennial Exhibition

Silenus the satyr famously said that the best good for man is never to have come into being, and the next best is to go out of it as early as possible. I was reminded of Silenus' gloomy wisdom as I confronted the individual works in the Whitney Museum's Biennial Exhibition (through June 2). There is, I think, scarcely a single work here the world is better off for having, scarcely a single one whose disappearance would not contribute to the goodness of the universe at large. Few of these works, if displayed elsewhere, would be worth anyone's special effort to see, and many, to borrow a phrase from the badly needed Michelin Guide to Horrors, would be worth a detour not to see at all. But for just these reasons it seems to me imperative to visit the exhibition. It must say something significant about American art in 1985 that what five curators judge representative should in fact be so appalling. It cannot have been easy to reject everything of artistic merit being done in the country today in order to make a point; but if the purpose of the exhibition is to reveal some deep disorders of artistic consciousness in the land, that knowledge may compensate for the agony of having to look at the show.

The contrast between the exhibition's lesson and its contents is signaled by the catalogue's cover. Front and back are a mottled gray, like a photograph taken from a distant satellite of the earth after a nuclear holocaust, but in the title, "Biennial Exhibition" is printed in yellow, made all the brighter by the bleakness of the background ("1985" is appropriately printed in a foreboding gray). The endpapers are black, black, black. The mounting of the show carries forward those funereal allusions. The works are widely spaced; there is an atmosphere of mortuary dignity; conversation is stifled as visitors stand in respectful silence before stillborn paintings. Jasper Johns's new work is executed in encaustic, the medium of the burial portrait in ancient times. Donald Judd's two untitled works look like a display of vertical coffins and a disturbingly gay horizontal columbarium, respectively. The museum is filled with sounds resembling the wan keening of electronic ghosts, the auditory components (generated by an anemometer on the roof) of a work called "Whitney Windspun," by Liz Phillips. As one clutches the catalogue, listening to these mournful noises while waiting for the elevator, one peers into the lower level where mosaic columns arise like the excavated remnants of a long-extinct civilization. The language of the installation could not be more legible, nor more effective in creating just the right mood for pondering disintegration and decay.

The few viewer-friendly works in the show are those that express and do not merely justify the overall attitude the curators must have taken such pains to achieve. These are works that, as it were, mourn for themselves, like poems about the death of poetry. Two mutually referential paintings by Eric Fischl compose a fine emblem. In "Portrait of the Artist as an Old Man," the old painter has his back to the canvas on his portable easel, his right hand holds a newspaper to cover whatever he is doing with his left hand, which looks like masturbation. His nearly blank canvas and the easel standing in *plein air* connote a period of art to which Fischl's work belongs at least in manner: the late Impressionism of Bonnard and Fairfield Porter. The sun is setting, as we can tell from the long shadows cast by the easel's legs and the artist's shanks. This is no country for old men, Fischl's painting says, pointing to the biennialists around it. In the companion work, a nude boy—too young to do what the old artist can evidently do no longer—also has his back to a painting which we recognize as one of Warhol's iterated effigies of Marilyn Monroe. The sun is rising on the new generation, blanking out part of the depicted work with the morning light. But the boy's eyes are closed as he sways to private sounds from his headset. Fischl suggests that the time is past for work like his. The wry self-referential pathos of the two paintings is enhanced by the surrounding evidence of its claim.

The exhibition as a whole turns its back on painting of the sort that Fischl's beautifully brushed and deeply intelligent work exemplifies. Of the eighty-four artists shown, thirty-three have chosen film and videotape as alternative forms of expression to painting and sculpture. Of the remaining fifty-one, a substantial number rely on some kind of photography. I hesitate to say that this shows a preference on the part of the curators, whom I interpret instead as highlighting their respect for another sort of art by not hanging it in this company and, where they have selected paintings, by choosing ones that use paint as though the artists had forgotten how to, or never knew. So the show is an elegy for the sort of art the curators believe in, but which is threatened by the work displayed. Fischl has made a gesture of heroic sacrifice in allowing them to make their point with his work which, admittedly, takes on a heightened significance in the context, a bit like Odysseus in the underworld.

And like the shade of Achilles, who expresses grief for his vanished substance, many of these works refer to the art of a more vigorous period with a nostalgia deepened by the frequency with which it is expressed. Two panels by Jo Anne Carson are animated by Cubist and Futurist cadences, and refer explicitly to Picasso and de Chirico, among others. John Duff's "Irregular Column (Orange)" refers to Brancusi's regular "Endless Column." Johns refers to the Mona Lisa. Sherrie Levine refers to the Russian avant-garde, Lessitzki, Chasnik, Malevich. There is a dopy depiction of an armless and headless torso next to an old-fashioned palette in Kim MacConnel's "Prince Charming." Perhaps nothing conveys this impossible longing for artistic reality better than "Mondrian Dancing," by Susan Rothenberg. In this artist's customary, but here especially significant, swipes and wipes of grey, black and white paint, Mondrian waltzes, ghost to ghost, with a spectral partner. His face bears the dim remnants of forms and colors we used to think of as austere but now appreciate as alive. Rothenberg's and Fischl's works are the only ones that seem to recall the life paint itself once had, the only works belonging to the world to which they refer.

These rare signs of self-reflectiveness and historical awareness flicker with an enhanced brilliance against the mindless art that composes the body of the show.

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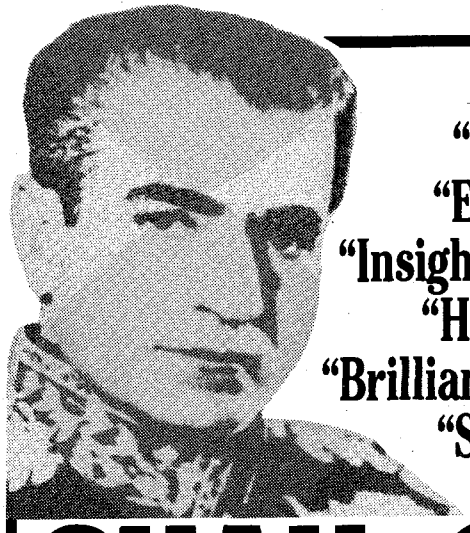

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HBJ HARCOURT BRACE JOVANOVICH

Mindless, joyless, irreverent, raucous, jeering, portentous, desperate and sad, the typical entry moves the viewer to compassion more than to criticism. Since criticism treats objects that are subtle enough to require a particular analysis and understanding, it really has no application here. What is called for is some social diagnostic since, after all, we are dealing with a whole group of works, by different artists, responding to what one must assume are common determinants. My own view, which I can but sketch here, is this: Twentieth-century art has been marked by a sequence of upheavals, each of which has challenged the premises of what went before. The several upheavals were so many stages in an effort to identify the nature of art, and the art's history has begun to resemble a philosophical investigation collaboratively pursued. These stages began to decrease in duration and increase in number through the 1960s until, I believe, the enterprise exhausted itself. But it was at just this point that forces of a different order began to impinge on the art world. These came for the most part from the world of fashion, which saw in the history I refer to something identical to a quite different sort of history—the history of fashion itself, which requires, for deep economic reasons, a new look each season. What were strenuous efforts at self-understanding in the art world were misperceived as strivings for novelty. And as the novel is the new, the media took a heightened interest in art: each new show, each new artist, is treated in *The New York Times Magazine* side by side with the latest in fashion, in decoration, in cuisine, in beauty.

So there grew up an intense external demand for novelty in art well past the time when there was any internal reason for it. And such is the nature of money that demand will create a supply if conditions permit. The art of the 1980s, and certainly much at the Biennial, is the art world's response to the restless appetite for the new. Work is accordingly reduced to being "new," to being "now." Ephemerality becomes almost a metaphor for the message. Hence, anything that looks as though it might last longer than a season is immediately under suspicion. Hence the raucousness. Hence the contempt and the simultaneous nostalgia for older values. Hence the desperation. And because of the immensity of the rewards for making it and the dismal consequences of not do-

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ing so, it is inevitable that each work should seek to outshout its rivals and that the art season should take on the tawdry assertiveness of the harlot's alley. What could be more disheartening than the effort to satisfy an empty impulse with the borrowed vitality of images that occur simultaneously in the nonartistic areas of our culture: the subway scrawl, the video arcade, MTV, the schoolyard, the Pentecostal tabernacle and the like?

The Whitney Biennials have more and more tended to participate in the frenzied pursuit of novelty, perhaps in the belief, borrowed from the fashion world, that the revolutions will continue perpetually and that every two years there will be a new one to record. I believe the curators of the 1985 Biennial have seen through this and have decided to end it by assembling work so awful that one cannot but wonder, If this is the cutting edge of art, whose throat is being threatened? They took a great risk in this, but if it changes the insane practices it will be worth it. In that case the show turns its back on itself, re-enacting the gesture of Fischl's penetrating work. Of course I may be wrong, in which case the exhibition is by a considerable degree worse than its contents. □

The Big Domino

JOHN DINGES

DISTANT NEIGHBORS: A Portrait of the Mexicans. *By Alan Riding. Alfred A. Knopf. 385 pp. $18.95.*

Mexico has always made ideologues uncomfortable. Its revolution antedated the storming of the Winter Palace and became, once institutionalized, a curious mixture of populism, race/class alliances, cronyism and corruption.

Rightists, particularly in the United States, see red in a country that counts Cuba and Nicaragua among its closest friends in the hemisphere, that expropriated U.S.-owned oil companies and nationalized its own banks and that harbors numerous Central American revolutionaries.

Latin American leftists fleeing military dictatorships in their own countries are grateful for the haven Mexico has offered. But they wonder how that country's progressive face can be squared with its poverty and social injustice—and with a government whose massacre of demonstrators at Tlatelolco Plaza in 1968 ranks with the worst atrocities of Somoza's Nicaragua.

Mexico is a nondemocracy, but one in which elections, while often tainted, play a crucial role. It would be malicious to describe its one-party rule—which has lasted for most of this century—as a dictatorship. Mayor Daley's political machine in Chicago would be a more apt, and more sympathetic, comparison.

For Mexico's is a political and economic system that has worked—until now. Even before the discoveries that made Mexico a major oil power, economic growth was strong and steady enough to make it look almost solidly middle class next to other Third World nations. Its per capita income of $2,270 is about one-fifth of U.S. per capita income, but—perhaps surprisingly—income distribution is only slightly more unequal in Mexico than in the United States. (The richest fifth of the population keeps more than 50 percent of the wealth in both countries, and the middle class's share of the pie is about the same.)

Politically, Mexico has achieved stability. It is one of the very few Third World countries whose military is not a threat to civilian rule. (Not by accident was Mexico the only Latin American country to turn down the United States's offer of massive military assistance after World War II.) Culturally, Mexico City ranks with Madrid and Buenos Aires as a center of Spanish letters. Its press is pluralistic and free swinging, if not entirely free.

Since 1970, Mexico has broken out of the isolationist cocoon that kept its foreign relations centered almost exclusively around relations with the United States. Led by liberal presidents Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo, Mexico achieved a prominence in Third World affairs which culminated in the 1981 North-South summit at the resort

John Dinges is writing Latin America: The Turning Point, *a book and a television documentary series on contemporary politics and culture in Latin America.*

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Edited and translated by Susanne Jonas, Ed McCaughan, and Elizabeth Sutherland Martínez **Preface by George Wald**

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Marvin E. Gettleman, Co-editor
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SYNTHESIS PUBLICATIONS

city of Cancún. In dealing with Central American conflicts, Mexico has persistently organized Latin American initiatives to counter U.S. dominance in the area—its early support of the Sandinista challenge to Somoza and, more recently, the Contadora peace negotiations are cases in point.

This is not a record to be taken lightly. Mexico demands our attention and our understanding. Alan Riding, one of the few U.S. correspondents in Latin America to whom the word "veteran" can be applied, has given us *Distant Neighbors* just when we need a major descriptive and analytical treatment of Mexico, one that would rescue it from the twin banalities of travelogue prose and academic impenetrability that characterize much U.S. writing about the country.

Riding spent a dozen years in Mexico, most of them as *New York Times* bureau chief. He distinguished himself by his meticulous reporting on Nicaragua and El Salvador (until death threats made it impossible for him to work there) and on Mexico's careening path from oil boom to debt bust in the late 1970s.

Distant Neighbors demonstrates why Riding's coverage rose above the pack: his knowledge of Mexico is both broader and deeper than the journalistic minimum needed to cover political and economic events intelligibly. He has immersed himself in Mexico's indigenous, colonial and prerevolutionary past, and in its social dynamics and culture.

Yet his portrait of the Mexicans is curiously derogatory, an assemblage of adjectival put-downs and pop Freudianisms applied to a people for whom, after twelve years, he feels mostly disdain. It is a book without affection, without sympathy. The Mexicans and their government are afflicted with "fragile masculinity" and frustration," have an "obsession with respect," are "impotent." Relations with the United States are unfailingly characterized in psychological terms which cast Mexico as the alternately chastened and rebellious adolescent, the United States as the scolding father.

These observations may contain their element of truth—most of them could be applied to any underdeveloped country's feelings of inferiority. But such generalizing about national psychological traits is a questionable intellectual exercise, especially when the purported traits are given sweeping explanatory

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power in areas as inappropriate as Mexico's domestic policy. Among the more overblown results are statements like this one: "The individual insecurities of ordinary Mexicans frequently become shimmering images reflected by the country as a whole." And this: "Just as alcohol melts the mask of machismo, it is during moments of crisis that the country's endemic self-doubts become visible through the screen of nationalism." And this: "The more blatant Mexico's economic dependence on the United States, the more the country needed to deny it." That kind of writing never made it into the author's *New York Times* articles; a bit of cold-eyed editing here could have combed out the cheap shots and retained what is otherwise a clear-headed description of how Mexico works and where it is headed.

Riding provides one of the best explanations I have read of Mexico's political system, for example. On the surface, Mexico is governed by strong, single-term presidents and a single party—the Institutional Revolutionary Party. Each president designates his successor, who is invariably elected, with or without occasional ballot tampering.

The system brought order to the bloody competition for power that followed the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Prior to the establishment of the present order by President Lázaro Cárdenas in the 1930s, all Mexican presidents were former generals, and all but one were either assassinated, exiled or otherwise deposed. Since Cárdenas, no president has emerged from the military, and not one has died in office.

The underlying key to success, Riding says, is the system's "ritualistic sense of hierarchy [combined with] an enormous capacity to negotiate." The president appears to have absolute power, but "behind a monolithic facade, he must share power with the country's key interest groups—the bureaucracy, traditional *políticos*, the media, organized labor, the private sector, the army, the intellectual left, and the church." Power and privilege are redistributed each term; a group left out in one administration can be confident that its slice of influence will grow in another.

Riding's prognosis for the Mexican system is pessimistic. He speculates that it would collapse if any Mexican president died in office, because the "intricate system of loyalties . . . would likely disintegrate." Recent attempts to encourage a more pluralistic array of political parties have called the viability of the system into question: "By trying to make the country more superficially democratic, more Western, more 'presentable' abroad, the system's roots in the population have weakened. It has become less truly democratic."

Even more alarming is Riding's conclusion about the political damage caused by Mexico's three years of economic crisis, the focal point of the book. As the author describes it, national pride forced Mexico (not a member of OPEC) to maintain high oil prices despite the world oil glut of 1981. As revenues plummeted—the amount of oil exported dropped by a half in one month—Mexico borrowed abroad to avoid cutbacks in ambitious economic development programs, many of which had already been financed by international loans based on confidence in future oil income. A year later, "debt crisis" was a household word. In Riding's view, these economic troubles threaten to destabilize the country's already partly discredited political system and drag Mexico into a cycle of social conflict:

> Mexicans have been extraordinarily tolerant of bad and abusive government, but their patience is being tested more than at any time in memory. . . . Already, Washington fears that the violent struggle between Left and Right in Central America could spread to Mexico. And although the "domino theory" is less worrisome than the ingredients for unrest apparent inside Mexico's own frontiers, the repercussions in the United States would be little different. A tidal wave of Mexicans of all classes entering the United States would be impossible to contain. . . . And in response to chaos next door, Washington might be tempted to intervene.

For Mexicans, that threat of intervention from their neighbor to the north is the fundamental fact of national life. □

Symmetrical Migrations

JAMES MARCUS

CONTINENTAL DRIFT. *By Russell Banks. Harper & Row. 366 pp. $17.95.*

Early in *Continental Drift*, Russell Banks compares the migrations of humanity to those of the elements: tides, winds, whole landmasses making their well-mapped, decorous circuit of the planet. One of the marvels of this book is the way it combines such an aerial perspective with particular, earthbound lives. Seen from ground level—the vantage point of most lives—this perpetual exodus has little of the bland and unimpeachable brutality of natural disaster. Instead, it can look heroic—a dogged determination to cheat entropy and death for as long as possible. This persistence, "an old-fashioned, biblical kind of heroism," powers the migratory lives in *Continental Drift* and makes even their eventual wreckage a source of celebration.

The destination of all these migrations is no less than the New World. And the New World, in this case, is Florida, although the story opens far to the north, in Catamount, New Hampshire, where the central character, a 30-year-old oil-burner repairman named Bob Dubois, has lived his whole life. Married to a local girl, father of two worshipful daughters, he's less an exemplar of upward mobility than of the improved consumer status at his particular rung. Banks details Dubois's possessions with the precision of a tax assessor:

> He owns a run-down seventy-five-year-old duplex in a working-class neighborhood on the north end of Butterick Street, lives with his family in the front half and rents out the back to four young people he calls hippies. He owns a boat, a thirteen-foot Boston whaler he built from a kit, with a sixteen-horsepower Mercury outboard motor. . . . He owns a battered green 1974 Chevrolet station wagon with a tricky transmission. He owes the Catamount Savings and Loan Company—for the house, boat and car—a little over $22,000. He pays cash for everything else. He votes Democratic, as his father did, goes occasionally to mass with his wife and children and believes in God the way he believes in politicians—he knows He exists but doesn't depend on Him for anything. He loves his wife and children. He has a girlfriend. He hates his life.

There's the rub, added to the tabula-

James Marcus is a novelist and critic who lives in Philadelphia.

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tion like one more item earned in installments. Bob discovers this hatred quite suddenly. On a typical windless Friday night, paycheck in his pocket, he drinks a few beers, enjoys some good-natured sex with his girlfriend and heads over to Sears to buy his daughter a pair of ice skates for Christmas. He arrives as the store is closing, and as the impatient salesman turns his back on him, Bob experiences one of the few epiphanies ever occasioned by a bald spot. That "tissue, thin, pink skin, then eggshell bone, then fleshy brain" strike him with their vulnerability, their helplessness. And abruptly, these qualities seem to describe his own circumscribed life. Shaken, he marches back to his station wagon and methodically smashes all the windows with his fist. When he arrives home, he and his wife agree to start a new life in Oleander Park, Florida, where his older brother, Eddie, owns a liquor store and dabbles in shady real estate. Off to the New World.

At this point, a second, symmetrical migration begins, and the two stories unfold in alternating chapters until they reach their terrible convergence. Vanise Dorsinville flees her "daub-and-wattle cabin in the hill country of Haiti a few kilometers west of Port-de-Paix," in the company of her nephew Claude and her infant son. They fear reprisals for Claude's theft of a canned ham from an overturned delivery truck. Pooling all the money Vanise's brother has sent from America, they pay a fisherman in Le Môle to ferry them to Florida. The fisherman has made a regular business, however, of unloading such clients on North Caicos Island, a speck of land 575 miles southeast of Miami; as he negotiates the harbor reef, he assures his passengers they're approaching Biscayne Bay. Thus begins a wretched and degrading middle passage. Aiming for Florida by way of Nassau, the Haitians are raped, abused, beaten, robbed and sustained by little more than persistence and the voodoo rites they carry from Allanche, "*les Mystères*, *les Morts* and *la Marassa*, the sacred twins."

In the meantime, Bob's life is falling to pieces. After thirty years in New England, he is frightened by Florida: the flat landscape of palmettos and citrus groves, the fast-food strips, trailer parks, billboards, car lots, "and beyond the car dealers, surrounded by chain-link fences, automobile graveyards, vast and disordered, dreary, colorless and indestructible." He's no less intimidated by the profusion of blacks, Haitians, Jamaicans—"more of them, or so it seems, then there were white people." They soon become so identified with the landscape that, as Bob makes love with a black woman he's met at the liquor store, he imagines himself a white boat, "a flat-bottomed Boston whaler, sliding easily onto the hot golden sands of a tropical beach . . . and behind him, the sea, surging, lifting and shoving him up and forward onto the New World."

In a less paradisiacal moment, he shoots and kills a young black man during a holdup attempt. From then on, his life unravels. He loses his job at Eddie's store and moves his family from their trailer in Oleander Park to a smaller, rusting box near Moray Key, where he becomes the captain on an excursion boat for angling conventioneers. During a rampage he destroys most of his remaining possessions. A good man quickly losing his goodness, he eventually agrees to a job that marks the convergence of the novel's two stories: smuggling a group of sixteen Haitians, among them the Dorsinvilles, from Nassau to Florida. The ensuing disaster leaves fifteen bodies washed up along Golden Beach and Hollywood, and sends Bob to an atoning death in Miami's Little Haiti.

Despite its alternating narrative, *Continental Drift* is essentially the story of Bob Dubois. Banks relates the Haitian episodes in a drier, detached voice, suggestive at times of the Haitians' own linguistic privacy: their Creole remains incomprehensible to almost every other character in the book, black or white. The slight flattening of tone is all the more striking because these chapters also carry supernatural accents, people and animals speaking in tongues. More noticeably, some of the lengthier accounts of voodoo ritual—like the long ceremony at the end of "Grand Chemin"—give off the gentlest whiff of something cooked up from a stack of *National Geographics*.

The chapters devoted to Bob contain little of this halting quality. Originally a writer of unabashedly experimental prose, Banks has developed a vigorous, unornamented style which moves easily between narrative and authorial aside. This facility allows a double-edged view of Bob, as an eloquently fleshed-out character and as a type, a subject for speculation. Banks steps onstage repeatedly to discuss Bob's character, intelligence and sexuality, but these lectures don't seem condescending; nor does Banks outfit Bob with the usual bloodless accouterments of the common man—sentimental honesty or sentimental ingenuity. Average, yes, but also solid, painful and real. As such, his running aground on the New World deserves our grief and celebration, as Banks notes in an "Envoi":

> Good cheer and mournfulness over lives other than our own, even wholly invented lives—no, especially wholly invented lives—deprive the world as it is of some of the greed it needs to continue to be itself. Sabotage and subversion, then, are this book's objectives. Go, my book, and help destroy the world as it is. □

Mother Wit

CAROLE S. OLES

ASSUMPTIONS. *By Marilyn Hacker. Alfred A. Knopf. 92 pp. $14.95. Paper $8.95.*

Marilyn Hacker's intelligence, wit, passion and craft have delighted her readers ever since *Presentation Piece* announced her arrival a decade ago. *Assumptions*, her fourth book, moves us with new strength and nerve. Hacker continues to explore the forms, powers and attributes a woman can assume, searching her past as the poems move from personal to mythic expressions of a woman's progress toward herself.

The personal tone of her work is clearest in the section of the book called "Inheritances," where the pain of the past is revisited through the poet's relationship with her mother, for example, in this sonnet:

> We shopped for dresses which were always wrong:
> sweatshop approximations of the lean-lined girls' wear I studied in *Seventeen*.
> The armholes pinched, the belt didn't belong,
> the skirt drooped forward (I'd be told at school).

Carole S. Oles's third book of poems, Night Watches: Inventions on the Life of Maria Mitchell, *will be published this year by Alice James Books.*

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Our odd-lot bargains deformed the
image,
but she and I loved Saturday rummage.
One day she listed outside Loehmann's.
Drool
wet her chin. Stumbling, she screamed
at me. Dropping
our parcels on the pavement, she fell in
what looked like a fit. I guessed: insulin.
The cop said, "Drunk," and called an
ambulance
while she cursed me and slapped away
my hands.
When I need a mother, I still go
shopping.
("Fourteen")

Another poem, "Mother," gives us some biographical facts while making it clear that what Hacker doesn't know about her mother is almost more significant than what she does. In part it's that ignorance that forces her to reconsider the past. Her own daughter, Iva, helps precipitate the poet's journey back, asking questions about her black Christian and white Jewish immigrant forebears. The stories must be told, must be heard.

Hacker sees her mother, herself and Iva in relation to one another. Her recollected distance from her mother is now measured against what her own daughter may feel for her. In "Towards Autumn," she writes, "I missed the words to make friends with my mother," and "Befriend/yourself: I couldn't have known to tell my mother/that, unless I'd learned it for myself./Until I do." The older and younger generations skewer Hacker between them in many of these poems, creating a tension that strengthens and enlarges them beyond those addressed to Iva in her third book, *Taking Notice*.

Many mothers are celebrated in this book, but accepting her own, with all the forgiveness that implies, is Hacker's most difficult and liberating assumption. We've been prepared for such a pardon by these lines from the "Regent's Park Sonnets," in *Taking Notice*:

It was not my mother or my daughter
who did me in. Women have been
betrayed
by history, which ignores us, which
we made
like anyone, with work and words,
slaughter
and silver.

Now, in *Assumptions*, come the poems that forgive.

Hacker moves out of the familial house of the first section in a group of thirteen sonnets called "Open Win-

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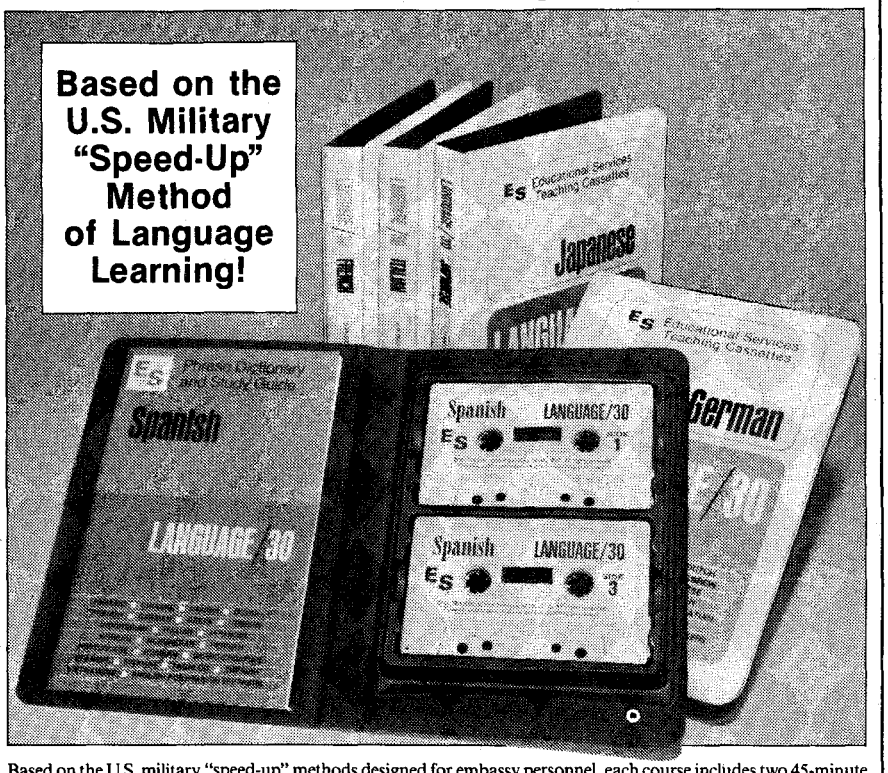

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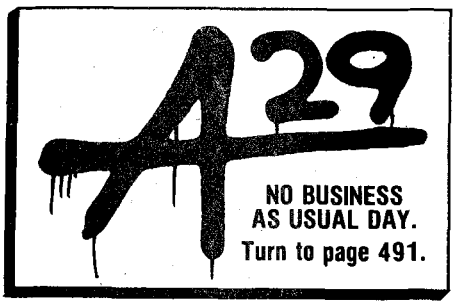

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dows." Speaking both to herself and to a lover, she airs such subjects as freedom and solitude, the roles of lover and mother, desire and satisfaction, justice and the disinherited.

Her tone shifts from intimacy and vulnerability to irony and vulnerability in "Graffiti from the Gare Saint-Manqué," a 170-line variation on the *ballade suprème* which wryly considers the life of a lesbian: "The sin we are/beset by is despair." The poem leaps borders and centuries; as in Hacker's earlier work, travel is an outward expression of the interior journey of the soul or libido. Like the title of the book, *Assumptions*, the diction of this poem rings Catholic bells: "Saint," "communicants," "sin," "celebrants," "salvation," "nuns." Hacker suggests the creation of a new faith for unbelievers in the old.

If, in the first section, the poet retrieves and invents her mother so that she and her daughter can understand and live their own lives, she appropriates a myth for a similar purpose in "The Snow Queen," a narrative sequence of eight poems. Again the work centers on mothers and daughters: the Robber Woman and the Robber Girl; the Snow Queen and her daughters; and Gerda, who must find other women to mother her. While in Hans Christian Andersen's tale Gerda's quest is for Kay, her male friend lured away by the Snow Queen, in Hacker's version he is only a pretext. Her real search is for herself. In "Gerda in the Eyrie," Gerda addresses the Robber Girl: "I almost love you. I've wanted to be you/all my life. You are asleep in the straw/with my story." In contrast to the Robber Girl, Gerda has inhabited a tiny world, by her own assent: "But I was happy where I was . . . I sat still." In the poem's final image, Gerda merges with her alter ego, suggesting the possibility of change.

"The Snow Queen" section closes with a prose poem, an encomium to "bad old ladies," who greet age with gusto on their own terms and are rewarded when their "daughters slog across the icecap to get drunk" with them. This image leads to the collection's final poem, a homage to the poet's "mothers," literary and historical.

That poem, "Ballad of Ladies Lost and Found," balances the earlier "Graffiti" in form and tone, finally lightening the book. While any archness in both poems can be read as protective,

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this is perhaps not the best note for *Assumptions* to end on. But since the poet's shaping of the book has been so deliberate, we must conclude the effect is intended. Hacker's strengths have always been most impressive in sequences and long poems—large structures that provide ample space for the play of her range. While no sequence in *Assumptions* has the intensity of the title poem in *Taking Notice*, the whole volume reads more like a single poem.

The formal dexterity we expect from Hacker animates *Assumptions*. Whereas Adrienne Rich (who has inspired and emboldened her) discarded the formalism of her earlier poems, Hacker continues to explore a multiplicity of forms, "venerable vessels for subversive use." Hacker's work is political, looking toward a new order of things. Hence, when she writes in forms associated with the primarily male poets canonized by literary history, it is as if she were slipping, in broad daylight, into a well-guarded preserve. She uses the decorous sonnet, sestina and villanelle to contain a vernacular, often racy speech. Playing against formal conventions and the surrounding language of the poems are lines like "Unsaintly ordinary female queers" and "(whenever I'm horny, I first think I'm/hungry)" and "I wish I had my knife. I bet she'll drop/it and lose it, or give it to that drip/and never use it for herself. Piss on her!" In another poet, Hacker's formalism may seem imitative or passé. Her subject and emotional range make it a claim to ownership.

In *Assumptions*, her most moving and personal book to date, Hacker reconciles all manner of polarities. More than ever, her poems make us forget to admire their technical brilliance. They deepen and expand our conception of what it is to be a woman. □

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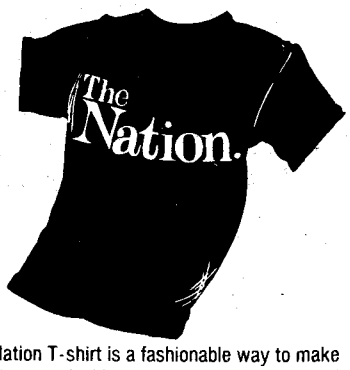

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SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2052

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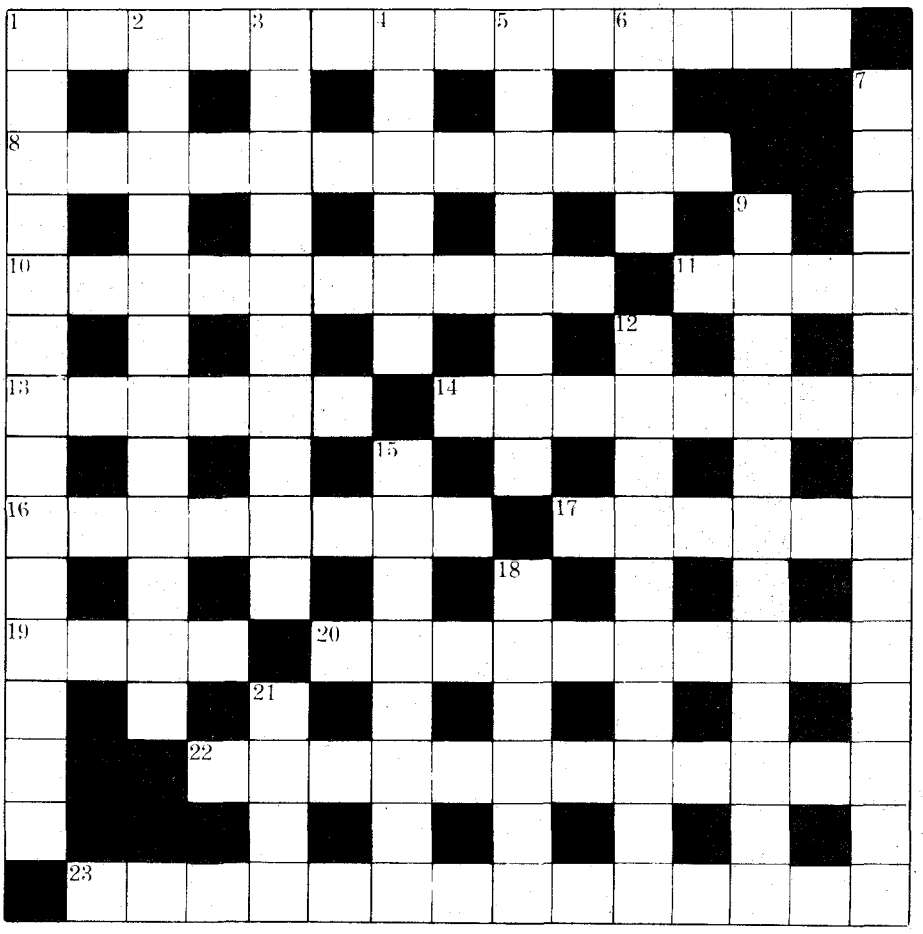
FRANK W. LEWIS



ACROSS

1 Pretty magnetic? Such quality in either case! (14)
8 Not easy? Truer words! Bill might be shaken by them! (8,4)
10 The country was named after this, not the other way around! (10)
11 Associated with red rice, when refined? (4)
13 Daniel, in trouble, pinned down like this? (6)
14 The story of one's mother-in-law, for example? (8)
16 Possibly a spiral in which I hold ice. (8)
17 A place in England where you might find a retired second-rate actor? (6)
19 One might do it to the ball, the fire or the plane—or even money! (4)
20 and 2 down Twenty-four hours, for good measure. (2,6,2,3,3,2,4)
22 Mean? Better than that! (5,7)
23 Their diamonds rate them as being worth more than a buck. (5,9)

DOWN

1 Caesar couldn't attribute this to lumbago. (1,4,2,3,4)
2 See 20 across
3 This might totally describe the case on the wagon. (10)
4 Flings in which violent spasms are heard. (6)
5 Brother writers coming from N. Andover. (3,5)
6 What the colonel said at Bastogne, coming up to knock 'em cold! (4)
7 One sees pictures of them fiddling at their work (with a kit, perhaps). One learned to take proper steps with them, however. (7,7)
9 The English imply this has the goods—night rite far removed from it. (7,5)
12 Saint to worship, or just an alarming man on horseback? (4,6)
15 Did Currier, when his partner left, get letters? (8)
18 Jazz tune, reputedly the output of some politicians. (3,3)
21 I repeat, it's a bird! (4)

SEE LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION AT LEFT

PUZZLED?

No more cross words. Find out why "little skipper" is a "truant." Send for a free copy of Frank W. Lewis's Ground Rules to *The Nation*, 72 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10011.

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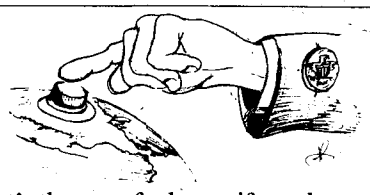
Reagan was saying things like 'What do I do now? Do I push this button?'



President Reagan's confusion was recorded in Daniel Ford's article, "The Button," which appeared in *The New Yorker* on April 1 and 8. We nominate it as required reading for all who think a living planet is a good idea and who are in no rush to experience Armageddon. Here is more of Ford's glimpse of the President and The Button:

> Elaborate war games have been held in recent years, Pentagon officials say. . . . President Reagan . . . has participated on occasion. He did not, however, according to Pentagon evaluation reports, appear to grasp the complexities that were involved. "I was disappointed in the simple credulity he showed, his willingness to play it at the most superficial level," a Pentagon aide told me. . . . "Reagan has spent very little time at it. He acted like an automaton, like part of the set instead of the main actor. Reagan was saying things like 'What do I do now? Do I push this button?'"

This is not an age that can trust the earth's future to automatons.

* * *

Over the years Friends of the Earth has earned a reputation as one of the main actors on the environmental front. We invite you to join us. What follows are some reasons we think you might wish to.

One of the achievements of FOE is the worldwide series of conferences on the Fate of the Earth. We initiated them to look into the essential relationship between national security, a sustainable society and conservation. We have been pleased with the number of organizations—some 150—that have endorsed the search so far. We are looking for more to join the effort to prove there can be no peace *on* the earth unless we make peace *with* the earth.

Friends of the Earth is not your average environmental organization. While it is true that we are the FOE that battles the vested interests that would dam wild rivers, stripmine mountains and sell wilderness to the highest bidder, we are also proud of our other battles. We not only fight to save wilderness; we also try to stop new dangers to the planet's well-being. Our flexibility and intuition probably led Stewart Udall to credit us with being "the cutting edge of the environmental movement."

We fought (and stopped) the development of the American SST, with a lot of help. We fought (and stopped) nuclear power plants at Rancho Seco, Sun Desert and elsewhere by coming up with economic alternatives. We're fighting (and hoping to stop) the plague of acid rain and the Environmental Protection Agency's plan to incinerate thousands of tons of toxic wastes on "burn ships" just off the nation's shores. The New Hampshire Conference on Acid Rain (FOE-organized) forced every Democratic presidential candidate to take a stand on this important issue (the President declined to come.)

Among all the environmental groups only FOE and The Wilderness Society were willing to oppose the confirmation of Interior chief Donald Hodel. We saw him as Watt Revisited, and, unhappily, he is proving us right.

FOE's was one of the first voices warning of the tie between nuclear power and nuclear arms, even before the word was out about the final season, nuclear winter.

And FOE was unique in the environmental community in publishing questions, still unanswered, about the events surrounding the shooting down of Korean Air Lines flight 007.

Our daring has lost us a few members along the way. It has also won many new members who share our belief in John Muir's observation, "When you try to pick anything out by itself, you find it hitched to everything else in the universe," and Thoreau's question, "What's the use of a house if you haven't got a tolerable planet to put it on?"

* * *

Dan Ford's *New Yorker* piece shows how frighteningly little security we get for our money. The Reagan strategy is strength through exhaustion, wasting resources on a nuclear Maginot Line and, with a blustering script, inviting sabotage and terrorism and leaving us open to it. Now we have the Reagan Star Wars gambit—a costly device to stretch this Maginot Line across the Milky Way.

The Reagan Administration promises security and prosperity, but it endangers the global economy and raids the limited resources that must last for all humanity's future. Reagan is thwarting the effort to conserve resources, to defuse the population bomb and to rescue the living diversity of the only place in the universe we know to have life on it. Reagan-led assaults on the earth magnify inequities, escalate tensions, accelerate anxieties and add to the supertension that can produce a nuclear Armageddon. Jonathan Schell warned of this in *The Fate of the Earth* and Lester Brown's *The State of the World, 1985* reiterates the warning.

As Canadian Marjory Loveys put it at the first acid rain conference a few years ago, "If all the world's a stage, this must be the gong show."

* * *

It doesn't have to be this way. All the planet's problems have been caused by people (especially *some* people), and people have the opportunity to solve them. There is no one reading these words who cannot make a difference. Not by just sitting there but by making a commitment. Share yours with FOE, and you won't be alone. Nor will we.

Thank you. —*David R. Brower, founder and chairman*

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